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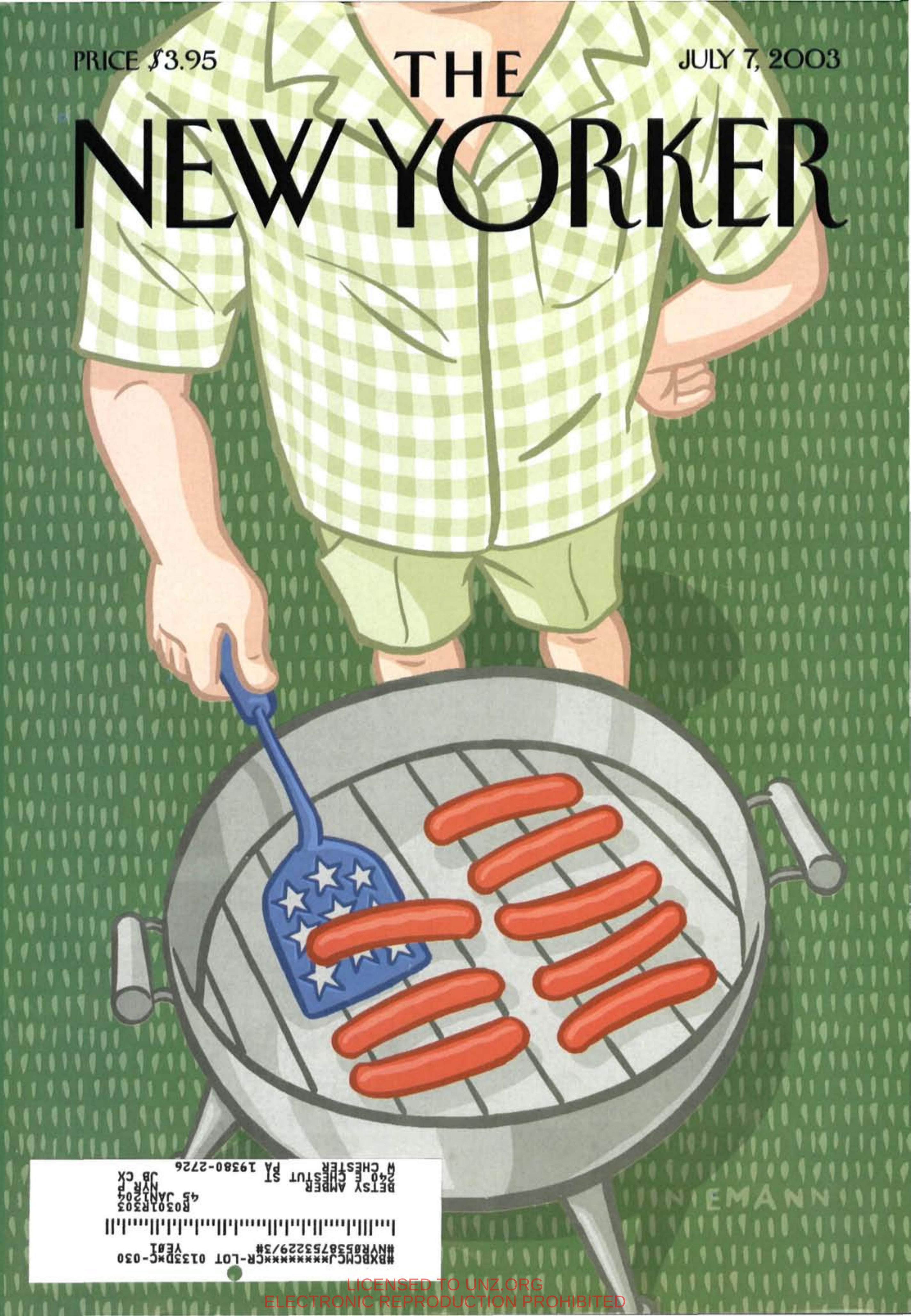

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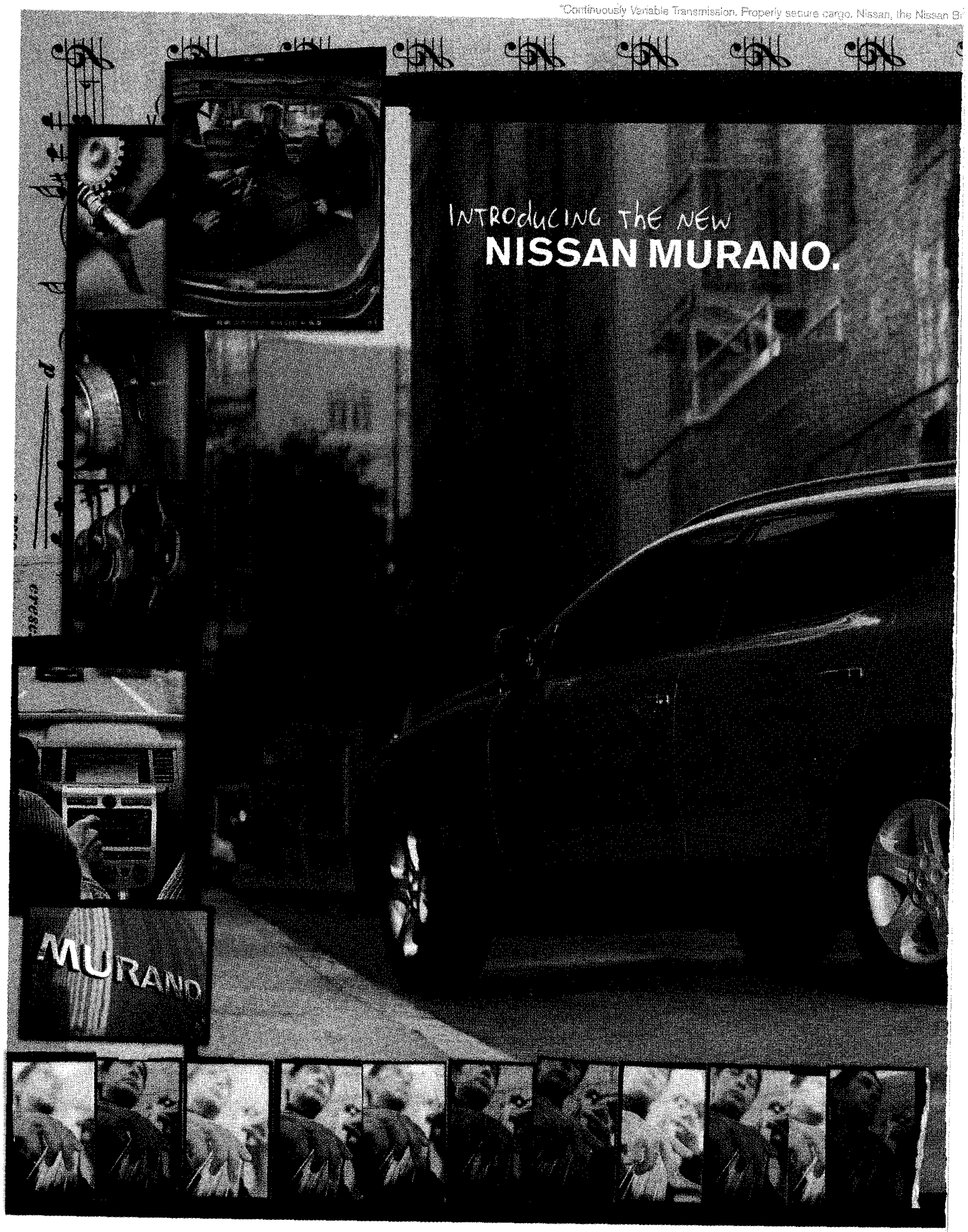
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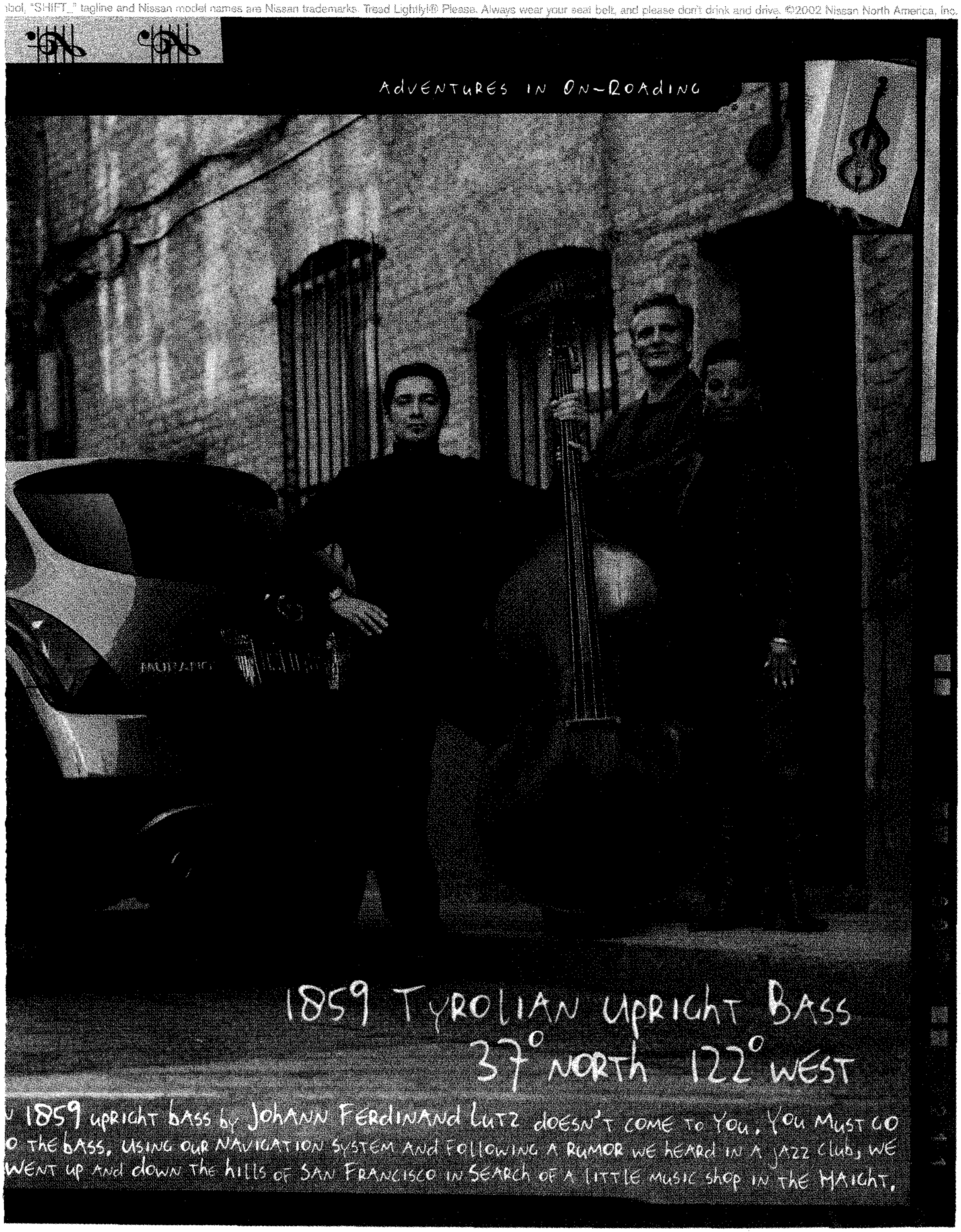
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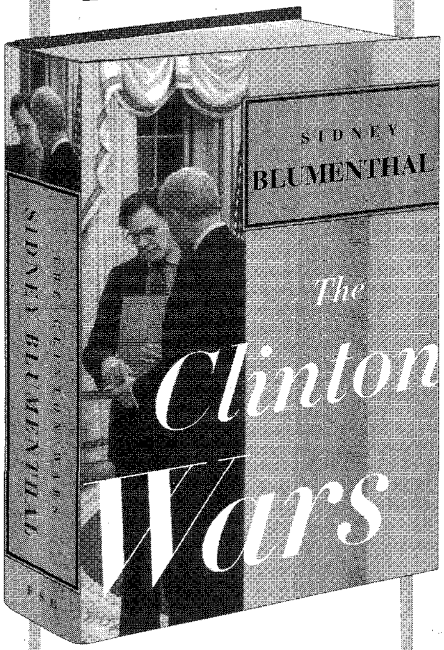

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THE NEW YORKER

JULY 7, 2003

8 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
23 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Gay marriage; blooming in the Bronx.

Peter Hessler 28 LETTER FROM CHINA
Underwater
The Yangtze swallows the past.
Ian Frazier 34 SHOUTS & MURMURS
From Across the Pond
Paul Goldberger 36 THE SKY LINE
West Side Fixer-Upper
What to do about Lincoln Center.
John Seabrook 42 A REPORTER AT LARGE
The Money Note
Is it still possible to create a pop star?
Laura Hillenbrand 56 PERSONAL HISTORY
A Sudden Illness
When she was nineteen, life went on hold.
John Updike 66 FICTION
"The Walk with Elizanne"

THE CRITICS
BOOKS
Julian Barnes 72 *Michel Houellebecq's "Platform."*
Hilton Als 76 *Arthur Kempton's "Boogaloo."*
77 Briefly Noted
Nancy Franklin 78 ON TELEVISION
Tony Shalhoub in "Monk."
John Lahr 80 THE THEATRE
"His Girl Friday," "Elmina's Kitchen."
Photograph by Richard Avedon.
David Denby 84 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"The Hulk," "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle."

POEMS
Richard Wilbur 39 "Blackberries for Amelia"
James Tate 60 "The Rally"

COVER *"What So Proudly We Hail," by Christoph Niemann* THE BACK PAGE *"Secular Cloisters," by Roz Chast* DRAWINGS *Robert Mankoff, Mick Stevens, Barbara Smaller, Danny Shanahan, Robert Weber, Lee Lorenz, Leo Cullum, Victoria Roberts, Frank Cotham, Charles Barsotti, Bruce Eric Kaplan, William Haefeli, Jack Ziegler, P. C. Vey, Gahan Wilson, Edward Koren, Alex Gregory, Robert Leighton*

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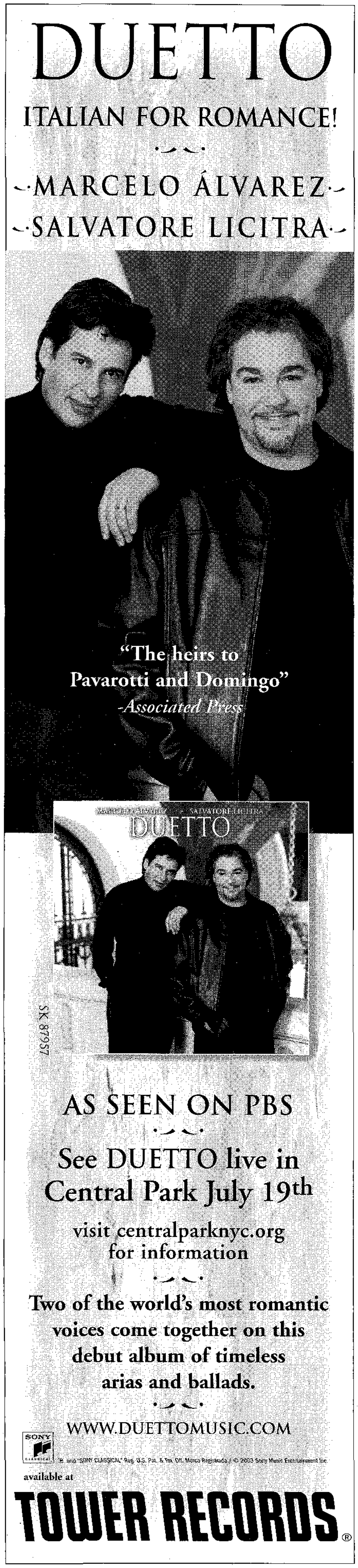

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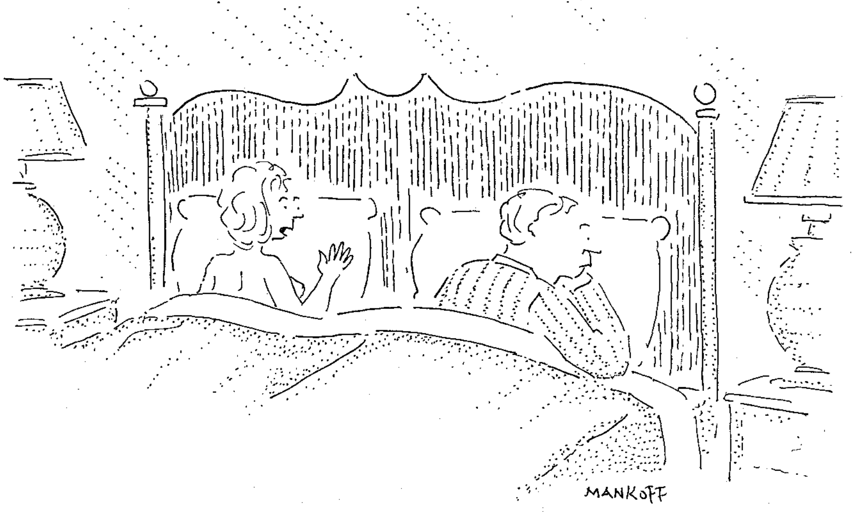

"Look, I can deal with a sexless marriage, but, for God's sake, we're having an affair!"

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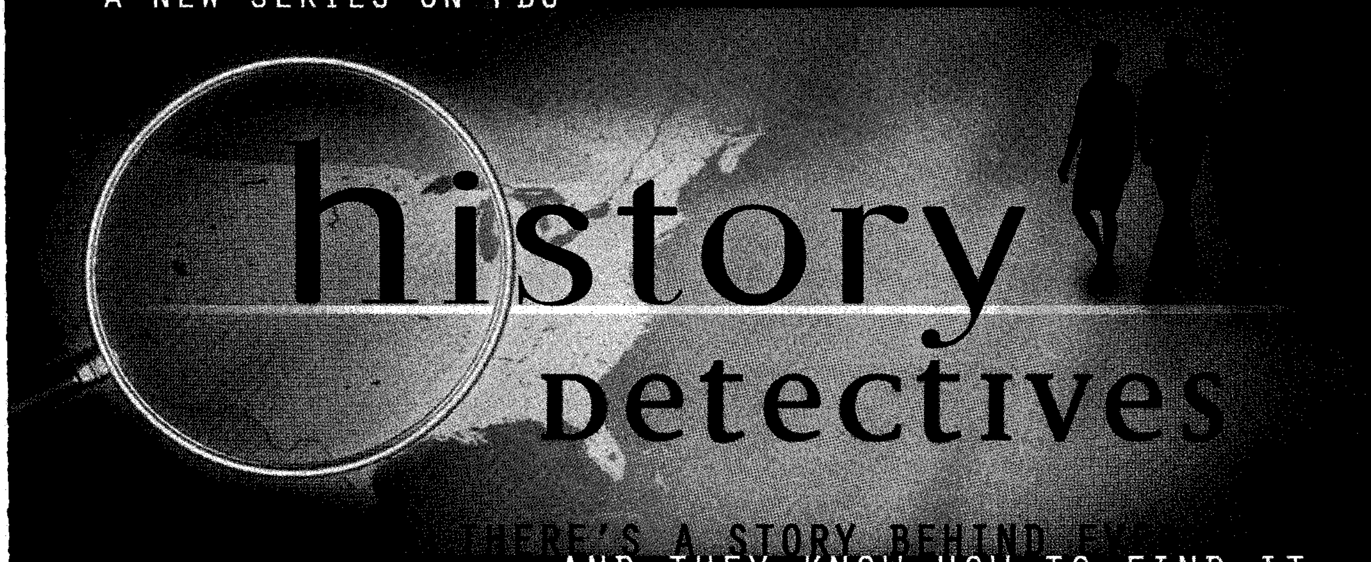
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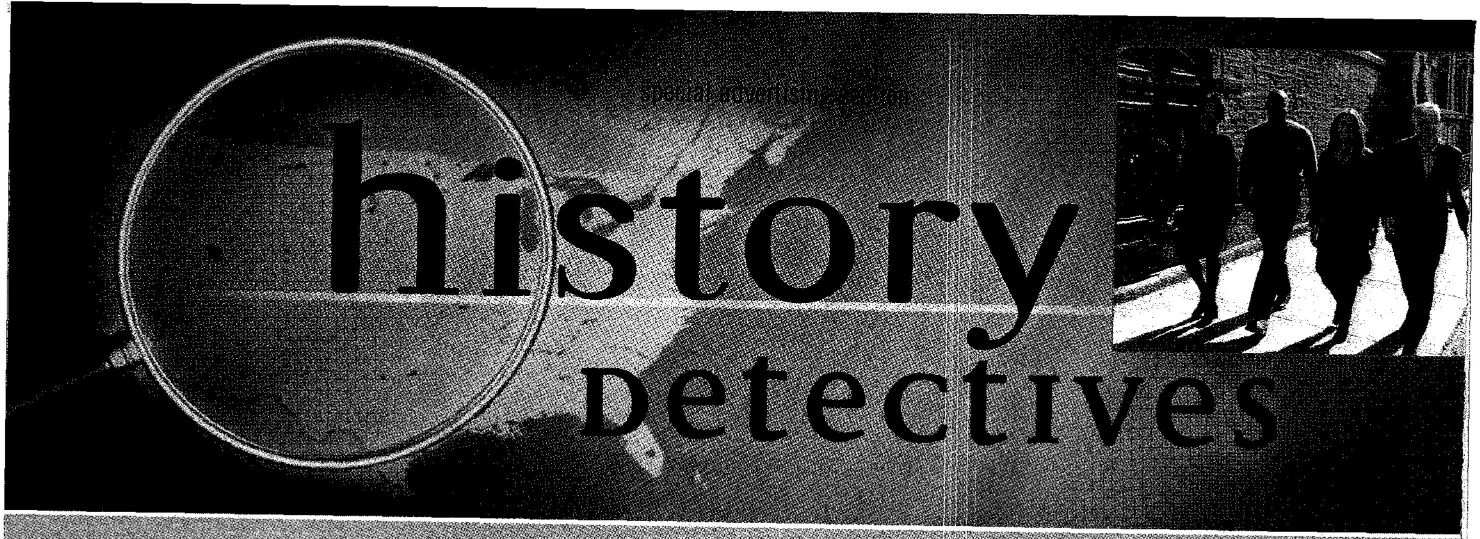

Special advertising section

history Detectives

ON THE CASE

Buoyed by the enduring success of "Antiques Roadshow," PBS will introduce a riveting new series about old treasures this summer. Premiering Monday, July 14th at 8 P.M (ET/PT), "History Detectives" combines elements of ratings-topper "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" with Emmy-nominated "Antiques Roadshow."

Each episode in the ten-part "History Detectives" program begins with a probing inquiry into an artifact or possession alleged to be of historic value. The mission of the show's talented team of academics, appraisers, and antiquarians is to suss out the real facts behind the purported antiquities. In the process, history is brought to life and viewers visit some extraordinary locations from coast to coast.

THE THRILL OF THE HUNT

"Many of our investigations start off on one path and end up on a completely different one," confides series' producer Tony Tackaberry. "It makes research tricky, but it also results in compelling, unexpected stories." Conundrums the tenacious team of experts will tackle include:

- Could a family-owned portrait of our first President be an authentic Gilbert Stuart—or is it the handiwork of a notorious forger?
- Does a collector's risqué jigsaw puzzle depicting women playing rugby mean the fair gender actually engaged in contact sports in the nineteenth century?
- Did a seventeenth-century Massachusetts home now owned by a California couple once belong to a landowner who was tried and convicted of witchcraft?
- Might a whaling ship docked in Mystic, Connecticut hold secrets about the Underground Railroad?

SUPER SLEUTHS

Scouring the country for answers, "History Detectives" hosts include "Antiques Roadshow" alumni Wesley Cowan, an appraiser and auctioneer who specializes in Americana; and Elyse Luray, an expert art historian and former auctioneer at Christie's auction house. They're joined by Gwendolyn Wright, a professor of architecture at Columbia University; and Tukufu Zuberi, a sociology professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Engaging personalities all, the sleuth squad communicates the excitement of discovery as well as the rigorous discipline of exacting research. "Best of all," says executive producer Nick Catliff, "They show how our lives today are inextricably linked to our individual and collective past." Particularly intriguing is how the researchers relate their findings to important social movements that were fermenting in bygone eras.

SEARCHING FOR CLUES

Objects themselves can be tricksters, shamelessly faking or concealing their true origins, actual dates, true provenances. And when eyewitnesses have been dead for decades—if not centuries—research often begins with the patient exegesis of primary source material. Everything from tracking down and scrutinizing centuries-old trial transcripts to personal diaries to town hall records of births and marriages is enlisted in the fact-finding process. "There's always a little thread that pops up," says Cowan. "You pull the thread, and see how far it unravels."

Each week the investigators call upon experts in forensics, historical research, and other fields. Viewers are introduced to methods of scientific analysis, such as dendrochronology (the identification of growth rings in trees to date events) and radio carbon dating (measuring age by the rate of decay of radioactive carbon atoms). As the experts combine research with Holmesian hunches, the show brilliantly illuminates the past to elucidate the present.

FOR INQUIRING MINDS

"Humankind from time immemorial has been interested in what came before," notes Cowan. "One of the things I hope will come out of the show is that anybody can become a history detective. There's no college that offers a degree in this field. One simply has to be interested and be willing to dig. Start with the question—and go where it leads you."

For more information on PBS' new "History Detectives" series or to submit your own story suggestion, visit www.pbs.org/historydetectives.

PBS

THE MAIL

WEAPONS AND THE TRUTH

Philip Gourevitch, suggesting that George W. Bush and Tony Blair misled the public about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, writes, "We are told that we went into Iraq to make the world safer, yet, even as the remaining members of Bush's axis of evil, Iran and North Korea, pursue nuclear-arms programs, many of the countries that allied with us against Saddam are wondering if they were falsely led" (The Talk of the Town, June 16th). He then wonders what the war in Iraq was about, if not weapons of mass destruction and their threat to the United States. Most Americans, however, are not asking this question. After September 11, 2001, Bush told the American people that the terrorist attacks were the work of those who hated freedom and democracy. By also characterizing the Iraq conflict as a war in defense of those values, he drew a straight line between the two events, even though no known link between Iraq and the attacks has ever been demonstrated. But if most Americans have little interest in asking what the war was really about, they should be asking themselves, now that we are in Iraq, what we plan to do with it, and how we are going to get out of there.

Daniel J. Hanneman
Maplewood, Minn.

Gourevitch's Comment captured a feeling that many of us have but have yet to see given political expression: that we were misled by the Bush Administration about the need to go to war. We were told, in effect, to trust the government because it had secret intelligence and knew what it was doing. What we need now is a thorough investigation of the sources of information that supposedly made war the only viable option.

Richard E. Kerner
Dallas, Texas

It's worth remembering, in reading Gourevitch's Comment, that past Presidents have not only lied about threats posed to America but also been held to account for their dishonesty. In 1846, President James Polk deceived the public into believing that Mexican troops who had crossed the Rio Grande had, in an unprovoked attack, "shed American blood on American soil." In response to this "invasion," General Zachary Taylor was ordered into action, and Congress declared war on Mexico. But when it became clear to legislators that the President had duped them Congress acted again: the House of Representatives censured Polk, finding that the war had been "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun."

Roger Brandwein
Scarsdale, N.Y.

TOLERANCE AND ITS VICTIMS

Larissa MacFarquhar is quite right to criticize India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies for whipping up anti-Muslim religious fanaticism among the illiterate Hindu masses ("The Strongman," May 26th). However, it is not so easy to dismiss Hindu complaints about the fact that Muslims are exempt from many laws, including those banning child marriage, and are allowed to follow religious Sharia law instead. These exemptions deny women not only benefits like alimony but also many basic civil rights. The B.J.P. has won support from many moderate Indians because it has proposed a uniform civil code dealing with marriages and divorces, for everyone, regardless of religious affiliation. You don't have to be a Hindu nationalist to believe that such a code is a necessity for a pluralistic Indian society. Without one, we will have an increasingly separate and unequal society, and women and children will be the main victims.

Saswatee Banerjee
Tsukuba, Japan

•

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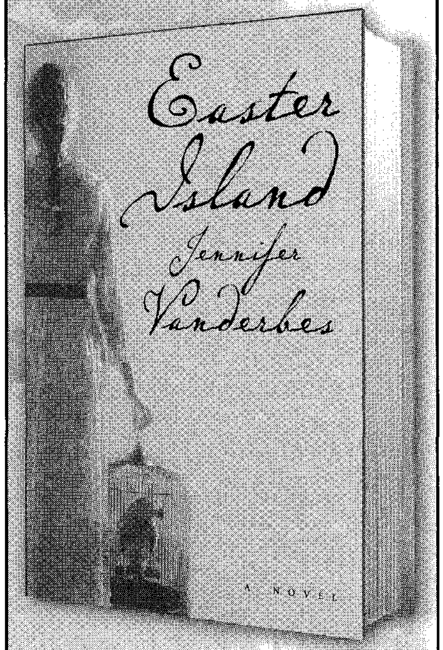

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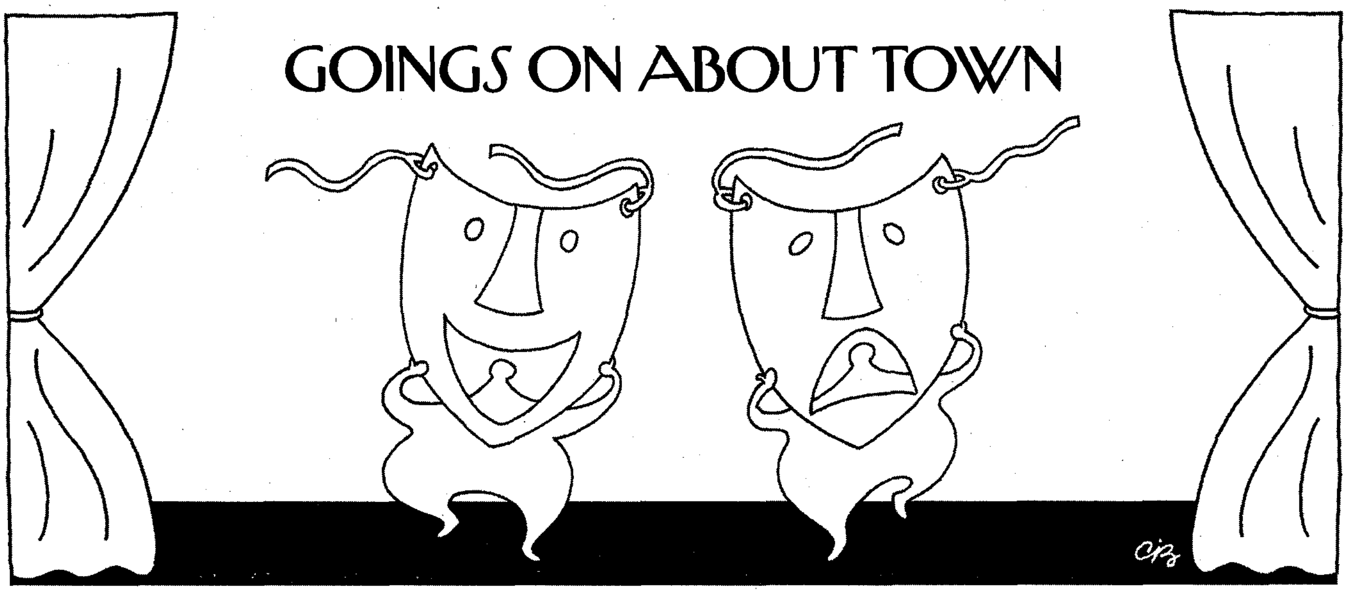

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE ANGEL PROJECT
The British director Deborah Warner ("Medea") brings a site-specific performance to the Lincoln Center Festival that takes viewers on a journey to several locations across Manhattan. Tickets are sold one by one (not to couples or groups); viewers discover their itineraries upon buying a ticket and enter the drama at five-minute increments. Previews begin July 7. (212-721-6500.)

BIG RIVER
Deaf West Theatre and Roundabout Theatre Company present an adaptation of the musical based on Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," which includes deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing actors, performing in both spoken English and American Sign Language. Directed by Jeff Calhoun. In previews. (American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE FISHERMEN OF BEAUDRAIS
Firedrake Productions presents the first staged performance of an unpublished screenplay by Ring Lardner, Jr., and Dalton Trumbo, about a rascal who is mistaken for a patriot. Adapted for the theatre by Joseph Rinaldi and Kathleen Rowlands. Directed by Keith Oncale. Opens July 3 at 8. Through July 20. (Bank Street Theatre, 156 Bank St. 212-868-4444.)

FLESH AND BLOOD
Cherry Jones and Martha Plimpton lead the cast in a New York Theatre Workshop production of a new play by Peter Gaitens about three generations of an American family. Adapted from the novel by Michael Cunningham. Directed by Doug Hughes. In previews. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

GETTING INTO HEAVEN
A gritty new play by Polly Draper (who also plays the lead) shows a rock star's struggle to keep her family and her love life from falling apart after a tragedy. With an original rock score by Draper's husband, the jazz musician Michael Wolff. Directed by Claire Lundberg. Opens July 2 at 7. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

HENRY V
The Public Theatre's Shakespeare in the Park offering this summer stars Liev Schreiber and is directed by Mark Wing-Davey. In previews. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

THE PROJECT
Two comedies written and directed by Allison McAtee run in repertory at the Chernuchin Theatre: "And Then There Was Nin," a quick-draw retro-nineties murder mystery and ironyfest, and "Confessions of a Wonderbabe," a superhero spoof that involves hip-hop choreography, martial arts, and a six-foot-five, booted supermodel. Starring Allison McAtee as the Wonderbabe. "Nin" has opened; "Wonderbabe" opens July 1 at 10:30. Through July 20. (314 W. 54th St. 212-971-5886.)

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OPENED RECENTLY

A BAD FRIEND
What's a girl to do when she's the only one in her family who's not in love with Stalin? Such is the plight of Rose (Kala Savage), the bright but confused teen-ager who is at the center of Jules Feiffer's evocation of political passions in nineteen-fifties Brooklyn. With his cartoonist's instinct for economy, Feiffer packs a lot of history into short scenes, avoiding pedantry by letting his characters show their desires and defenses in their speeches. Their extreme attitudes and fierce justifications are deliciously comic, but the jokes become painful as the betrayals multiply. Jan Maxwell is ferocious as Rose's embattled mother; struggling against sentiment, she's so armored in ideology that when disillusionment bends her, she can only break. Well directed by Jerry Zaks, who does not overplay contemporary parallels. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. Closes July 27.)

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
"How can a woman have a husband when all the men still belong to their mothers?" asks Minnie (Angela Reed), the title character of D. H. Lawrence's 1911 play. The brooding domestic drama unfolds against the backdrop of a miners' strike in a town in Nottinghamshire and features Gareth Saxe as the husband and Mikel Sarah Lambert as his mother. Directed by Martin L. Platt, it's spoken in an odd northern dialect called Ilson, but the play's anthropological value is undermined by Lawrence's limited dramaturgical skills—the exposition is endless, and his idea of realistic dialogue is to have the characters repeat themselves two or three times per speech. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. Closes July 27.)

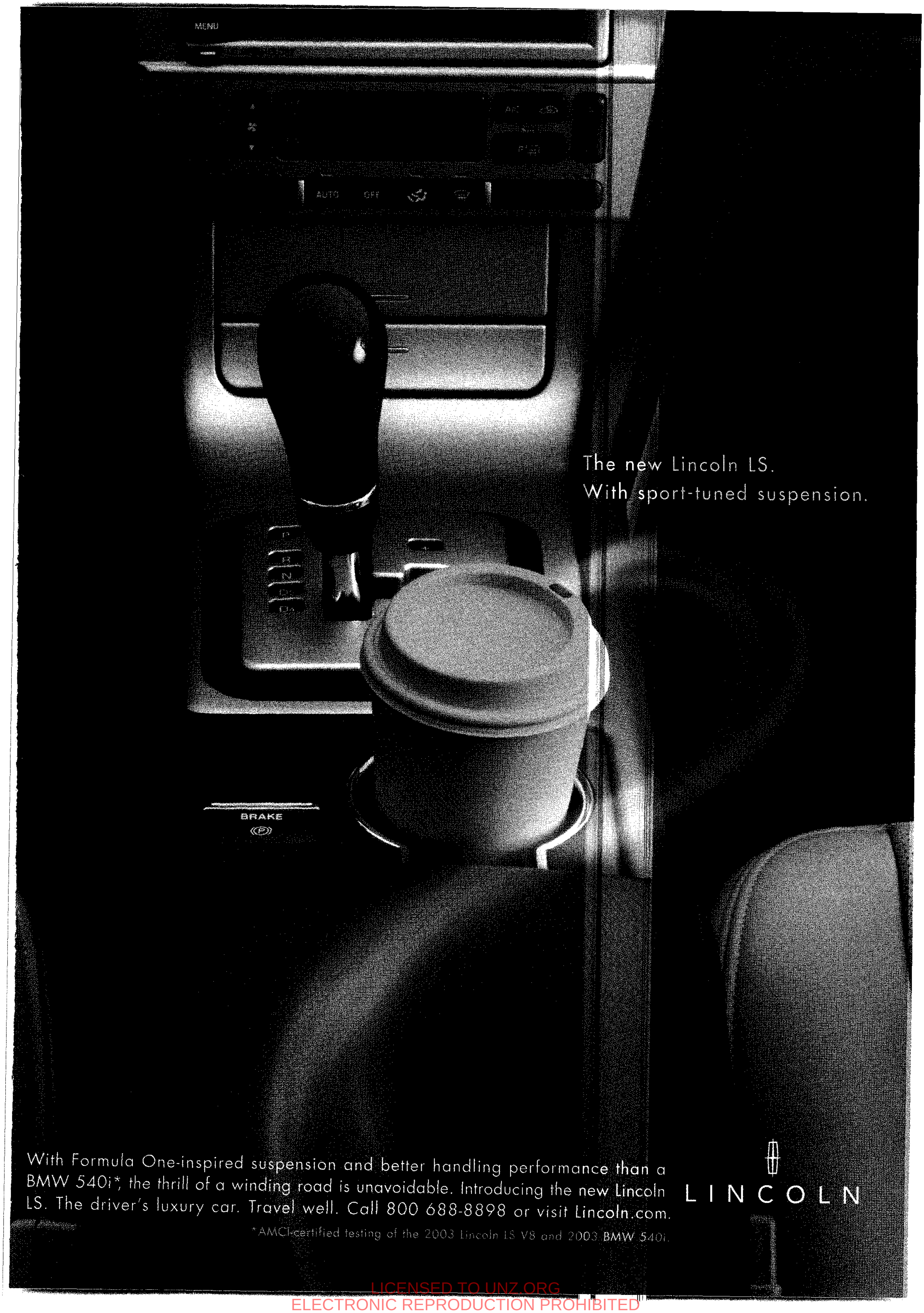
EIGHT DAYS (BACKWARDS)
Jeremy Dobrish's latest play accomplishes something special: it rescues the term "soul mate" from the teen-movie set. He's writing about serious adults who really love each other, or really want to. In the first of eight vignettes, the fifty-something, blue-collar Frank (Bill Buell) boldly risks pleasuring his wife of decades (Randy Danson) by squeezing into leather bondage gear, hoping only to be a good slave. In another exchange, Jonathan (Josh Radnor) delivers an inspired postcollegiate rant that would be, if posted online, the best and most touching thing to ever hit JDate. Mark Brokaw deftly handles the direction of a talented ensemble. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Closes July 5.)

FLOW
Will Power wrote and stars in a new play that carries the griot tradition into the present day, telling the story of seven modern urban bards through rap and rhyme, accompanied by DJ Reborn. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. Closes July 20.)

FROM MY HOMETOWN
Three out-of-towners hit New York and bond over their dream of singing at the Apollo in an Amas Musical Theatre production, directed by Kevin Ramsey. The men sing a jukeboxful of R. & B. standards, with musical direction and arrangements by Jo Lynn Burks, and also perform half a dozen new songs. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through July 12.)

A GLANCE AT NEW YORK
In 1848, the urban myth of Mose the Fireman—a beer-swilling, river-jumping god of the streets—was created in Benjamin Baker's original production of this play, which is now receiving its first New York revival since the Civil War era. In the Axis Company version, Jim Sterling stars as the mutton-chopped Mose, and Brian Barnhart and David Crabb play a pair of hardworking con artists. The cast perform their melodramatic roles with gusto, but they are so heavily caked in ghostly makeup (they look as though they've been assaulted by sacks of flour) that it's hard to pay attention to anything else. In whiteface, echoing one another's lines like a choral arrangement of Rain Men, they make nineteenth-century New York seem like a melting pot of cracked-out pod people. Directed by Randy Sharp. (1 Sheridan Sq. 212-807-9300. Closes July 19.)

I AM MY OWN WIFE
The play is—as its title broadcasts—the story of a narcissist. Nothing, however, can prepare you for its hero, Lothar Berfelde, a transvestite and collector who, living for decades in East Berlin as Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, survived first the Nazis, then the Stasi. There is no makeup, no feminine exaggeration, no camp, no sense of defiance or despair in her presentation of self. At first glance, she could almost be a nun. As Jefferson Mays brilliantly embodies her, she is a meticulous, modest soul. What is sensational about her is her normality. The playwright, Doug Wright ("Quills"), conceives the evening as a sort of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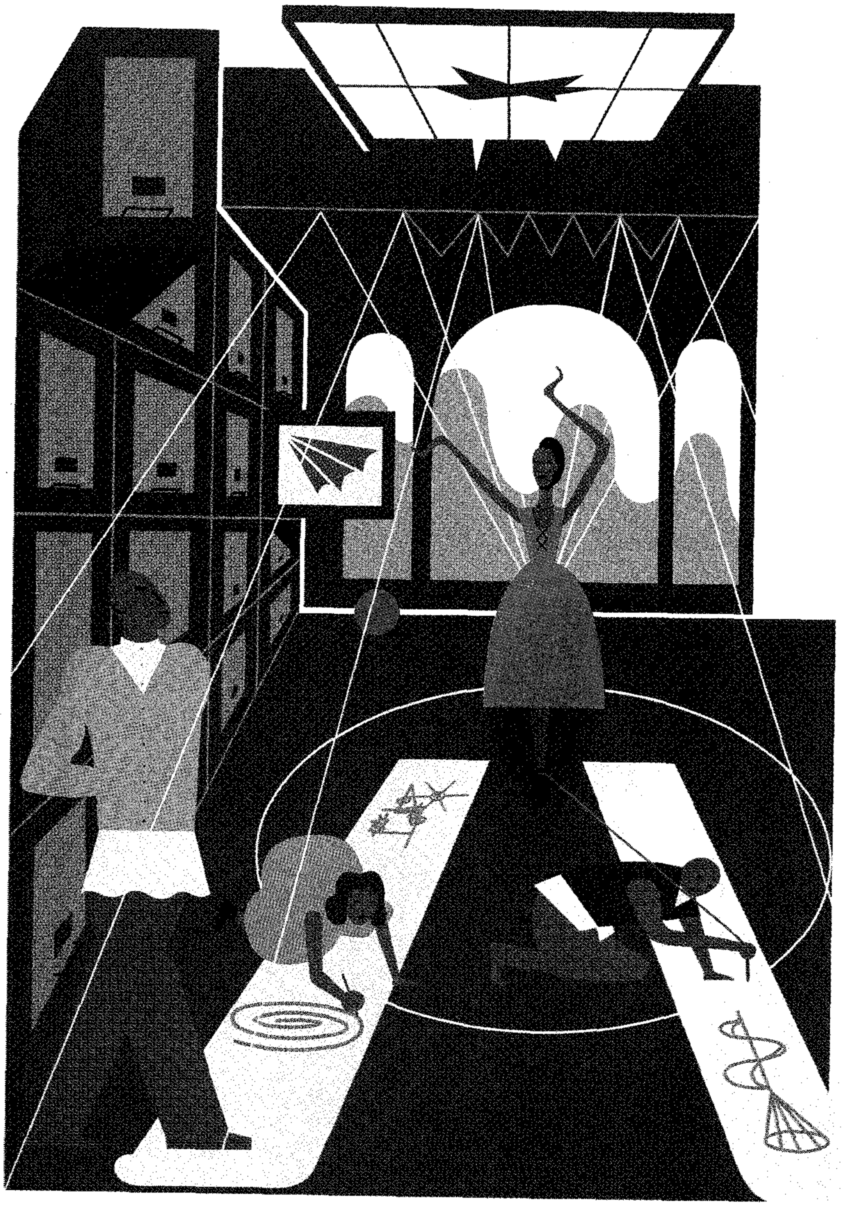

Mary Zimmerman's "The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci," at Second Stage.

RICHARD McGUIRE

detective story to uncover the facts of Charlotte's life, and Mays plays all the characters with thrilling credibility. Moisés Kaufman's strong direction makes the transitions both clear and compelling. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/9/03.) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Closes July 20.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST
The Aquila Theatre Company presents a new production of Oscar Wilde's comedy of manners, created by Peter Meineck and Robert Richmond and directed by Richmond. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 150 E. 25th St. 212-239-6200.)

INTRIGUE WITH FAYE
In this moody relationship drama by the "Six Feet Under" writer and producer Kate Robin, a narcissistic, insecure couple, united chiefly by mutual mistrust and a dependence on bottled water, start videotaping each other to see if their feelings seem more real when they're canned. Pretty Benjamin Bratt has the vivacity of a Styrofoam cutout, and his voice sounds microwaved. It's hard for Julianna Margulies's character to drape her pettish resentments on him, but she tries, wanly. The play redefines "straight to video." Directed by Jim Simpson. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Closes July 16.)

LAST DANCE
You may not want to like a play about a famous writer who retires to a villa in the South of France and casts off her strapping younger lover, but the playwright, Marsha Norman, wins you over. On a staid, pretty set that evokes the Britcom "As Time Goes By," funny and bitter truths emerge with surprising sting, mostly from the mouth of Randall (David Rasche), a courtly but jaundiced Southerner who wants to wrest Charlotte, the writer, from her Adonis, Cab (Lorenzo Pisoni), whom he nicknames "Cabernet" and "Cabana. As in boy." But his jealousy is unnecessary; Charlotte (JoBeth Williams) has already decided to hand Cab off to her goddaughter, Georgeanne (Heather Goldenhersh), because she's "tired" of love. Goldenhersh uses a juleppy Southern accent and has a dewy ingenuousness that recalls the young Shirley MacLaine. She's powerful in her artlessness, sexy because she's not trying to be. Directed by Lynne Meadow. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Closes July 6.)

"MACK THE KNIFE" . . .
THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF BOBBY DARIN
"Splish Splash," "Dream Lover," "If I Were a Carpenter," and the above ballad have been whipped into a musical tribute to Bobby Darin by Chaz Esposito, who plays the title role and directs, and James Haddon, the musical director. With a nine-piece band. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

"MASTER HAROLD" . . . AND THE BOYS
The "boys" of Athol Fugard's play, set in the nineteen-fifties, are two adult black South Africans, Willie (Michael Boatman) and Sam (Danny Glover), who work at the St. Georges Park Tea Room and spend much of their time bantering with a seventeen-year-old whippersnapper, Hal (Christopher Denham)—or Hally, as they call him—who is the son of the tearoom's owners. What begins as a gentle dance of teasing and reminiscence between three people who are clearly family turns into a tense standoff, as a series of phone calls introduce the problem of Hally's father—a crippled, abusive drunk. When Hally begins to bad-mouth his father, Sam tells him to watch his tone, and a war begins in which pain, fury, love, and hate ricochet between the two of them. Grieving and wanting to inflict grief in return, Hally uses race as a weapon to hurt Sam and hurts himself, too. Directed by Lonny Price. (6/9/03) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Closes July 15.)

THE NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI
Mary Zimmerman ("Metamorphoses") brings her 1993 play about the imagination of da Vinci back to Second Stage in a production that combines dance, theatre, music, and acrobatics. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

ST. CRISPIN'S DAY
Matt Pepper's new play is, essentially, "M.A.S.H." goes to Agincourt—but it draws on the slashing humor of the movie, not the softer pieties of the television series. Pepper sets the drama on the eve of the climactic battle of Shakespeare's "Henry V," but he concentrates on the soldiers instead of the king. Never didactic, always funny, his reshaping of Shakespeare's history is a vibrant disquisition on what it means to be a fighting man. Directed with keen insight and well-deployed physical humor by Simon Hammerstein. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl., between W. 11th and Perry Sts. 212-868-4444. Closes July 20.)

TERRITORY
The Bottle Factory Theatre Company ("Peter and Vandy") presents a new play by Lawrence Levine—an unconventional love story that stars John Good and Amanda Gruss, as a couple who live in the East Village, and Grant Varjas, as an old roommate who pays an unexpected visit. (195 E. 3rd St. 212-868-4444. Closes July 6.)

OUT OF TOWN

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
The seventeenth season of the festival at Boscobel begins with the romantic comedy "All's Well That Ends Well," performed under a tent with views of the Hudson River Valley. Directed by Terrence O'Brien. With Michael Borrelli, Gabra Zackman, and Nance Williamson. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM
Village, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.

ENCHANTED APRIL
Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

GOLDA'S BALCONY
Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. (Closes July 13.)

GYPSY
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY
Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

KIKI AND HERB: COUP DE THÉÂTRE
Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St., between Bedford and Hudson Sts. 212-239-6200.

THE LAST SUNDAY IN JUNE
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes July 6.)

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT
Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MAN OF LA MANCHA
Al Hirschfeld Theatre, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

NINE
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

OUR LADY OF 121ST ST.
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-307-4100. (Closes July 27.)

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

TAKE ME OUT
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

TEA AT FIVE
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes July 13.)

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

PILOBOLUS
This summer's engagement samples early and recent repertory in three programs, each with one première. Michael Tracy's "My Brother's Keeper" shows the group's typical free-association contortions, Alison Chase's "Star-Cross'd" uses the company style to riff on Shakespeare, and Jonathan Wolken's "Wedlock" paints concise portraits of couplehood in eight short duets. In more than thirty years of dance, Pilobolus's trademark acrobatics have acquired a patina of familiarity—not least because the troupe's success has spawned many imitators—but they still dazzle and amuse. Even a vintage work can seem startlingly fresh, as in "Untitled" (1975), in which an accumulation of quirky stunts tips over into strange poetry. (The Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. July 2-3 and July 7-8 at 8, July 4 at 5, and July 5 at 2 and 8. Through July 19.)

DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM
The group, directed by its co-founder, Arthur Mitchell, makes its first appearance in the Lincoln Center Festival, presenting two programs that include works by Balanchine, Robbins, Ashton, and Robert Garland, as well as the première of "St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet." Inspired by the 1946 Broadway musical "St. Louis Woman," the dance was choreographed by Michael Smuin and includes Joseph E. Fields's new orchestrations of Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer's music. The dancers are accompanied by a fifty-piece orchestra, singers, and a jazz ensemble. With sets by Tony Walton, lighting by Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer, and costumes by Willa Kim. Opens July 8 at 8. Through July 13. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-5570.)

OUT OF TOWN

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
With his devotion to music and his insistence on live accompaniment, Mark Morris is naturally drawn to Jacob's Pillow: it's so close to Tanglewood. Among this season's selections on the main stage, only "Going Away Party," Morris's hilarious take on cowtown dating, is set to a recording (by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys). Otherwise, the dancers and the local musicians soar together. In Morris's early, gender-bending "New Love Song Waltzes," the music is by Brahms, and in the severe and monumental "Grand Duo," it's by the modernist composer Lou Harrison, who died in February. "Serenade," Morris's tribute to Harrison and his newest solo, is a simple and rich piece that shows a great dancer pushing fifty, his expression both refined and diminished, his vision clear. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Ted Shawn Theatre. July 2-4 at 8, July 5 at 2 and 8, and July 6 at 2.)

"DOUG VARONE'S SHORT FICTIONS"
In Jacob's Pillow's Doris Duke Studio Theatre, Doug Varone focusses exclusively on veteran dancers, setting his younger company members aside to present a collection of solos, duets, a trio, and a quartet for himself and three older performers—Nina Watt, Peggy Baker, and Larry Hahn. Ranging through music from a suite of Romantic piano pieces to the country cries of Patty Loveless (in an excerpt from last year's evening-length dance, "Bottomland"), Varone keeps returning to heartache, poking at it like a sore tooth. In "Distance," a farewell duet he dances with Hahn, who's retiring this year, Varone shows the frustrated affection of taciturn men—an emotion that is captured by the men's gestures but is overwhelmed by long, dull patches that parallel Steve Reich's minimal, repetitive score. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. July 3-4 at 8:15, July 5 at 2:15 and 8:15, and July 6 at 5.)

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NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING

The **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra** steps out on July 2. The key members of this bruising aggregate led by the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis have been together long enough for their collective sound to have the polished sheen of groups from the heyday of swing. But the band doesn't traffic in nostalgia. It simply flaunts old-fashioned musical muscle. The following night the Dominican-born accordionist **Joaquín Díaz** and his band lay down the merengue. July 4: The d.j. **Bobby Morales** sends Independence Day revellers back to the days of disco. July 5: Salsa with the **Spanish Harlem Orchestra.** (Fountain Plaza, Lincoln Center. For more information, call 212-875-5766. All shows are at 7:30, with dance lessons starting an hour earlier.)

FOO FIGHTERS

After stints of recording with both the Queens of the Stone Age and the post-punk juggernaut Killing Joke, the ex-Nirvana drummer and alternative-rock pinup Dave Grohl returns to lead the remarkably successful Foo Fighters, who hit the road again to fight foo in support of their fourth album, "One by One." With the impassioned singer-songwriter **Pete Yorn** and the reverb-saturated country rock of **My Morning Jacket.** (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. July 2-3 at 7:30.)

Orchestra Baobab heats up Central Park SummerStage.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE

July 2 at 7: The Malian singer **Oumou Sangare** has an otherworldly, serpentine voice, which is often backed by gently loping guitars, forlorn violin, and distant percussion. With her compatriot vocalist **Ramata Diakite.** July 5 at 3: **Chaka Khan** feels for you. July 6 at 3: The seminal Senegalese ensemble **Orchestra Baobab** brings its ebullient Afro-Cuban spirit back to New York City. Thirty years ago, the group's languid harmonies, melodic drumming, and inventive guitar riffs packed Dakar's Club Baobab, but in the early eighties, as guerrilla warfare swept West Africa, the manic beats of *mbalax* swept away the Orchestra Baobab and the slower-paced Latin sounds that had captivated the region for decades. The group soon disbanded, but bootlegged versions of its now-classic 1982 recording, "Pirate's Choice," spread around the world, and Baobab regrouped in 2001. Last year brought a new album, the aptly titled "Specialist in All Styles," which, despite the group's break of some fifteen years, sounds less like a comeback than a sweet continuation of their early triumphs. With the Cuban band **Sierra Maestra,** whose timeless *son* makes this afternoon a perfect bill. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777.)

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!

July 3 at 8: The **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra** (see Midsummer Night Swing). July 5 at 7:30: Salsa and merengue with **Cuco Valoy** and **Nueva Era.** (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882, ext. 45.)

HUDSON RIVER FESTIVAL

July 4 at 4: **Ryan Adams'** second solo album, "Gold," with its inverted-flag-bedecked cover and jangling chorus of "Hell, I still love you, New York" was released just two weeks after the terrorist attacks here, and thanks to a combination of coincidence and marketing, the wave of post- 9/11 patriotism carried the alt-country bad boy right into the mainstream. Fittingly, the former front man of Whiskeytown (a reunion of which is said to be brewing) shuffles through the city for an Independence Day show on the lawn at Battery Park. The prolific prima donna is an enjoyable yet moody and unpredictable performer, so potential wits are forewarned: forget the tiresome requests for "Summer of '69." (Lawn at Battery Park. 212-835-2789.) July 8 at 7: Given the location of this performance (outside the World Financial Center), it's a good bet that the notoriously outspoken poet and proto-punk rocker **Patti Smith** will have some pointed things to say about the state of the world. Between bursts of feverish exhorting, expect her to dust off a few signature classics. (For more information, call 212-528-2733 or visit www.hudsonriverfestival.com.)

PEARL JAM

These veterans of the nineties grunge wars have survived by significantly lowering their profile, and they are now a seasoned unit with a devoted following. Recent onstage remarks about the President by the throaty singer Eddie Vedder invited scorn similar to that of the Dixie Chicks debacle, but the band admirably shrugged off the trouble. With the British punk royalty the **Buzzcocks** opening on the 8th and celebrated indie rockers **Sleater-Kinney** on the 9th. (Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. July 8-9 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—July 5: **Steel Pulse.** This Birmingham, England, reggae outfit has turned out more than a dozen albums during the past three decades, but it is best experienced live, when the gravelly vocalist David Hinds converts even the most strident polemic into a party. July 7: **Placebo,** a British trio of glamorous punk-popsters with a penchant for androgyny, return to the States to promote their fourth album, "Sleeping with Ghosts."

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—July 3: The Zimbabwe native and pioneering *mbira* (thumb piano) player **Stella Chiweshe.**

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—July 2-3: The **Slackers** are veterans of N.Y.C.'s ska revival of the last decade. July 3 and subsequent Thursdays this month: **Sasha Bell,** the front woman for the Essex Green, starts a monthlong residency in the Old Office space. July 6-7: The **Fall.** The indefatigable progenitors of British post-punk acerbity stagger into their fourth decade. The front man Mark E. Smith's signature vocal delivery (he has a thick Mancunian accent, and he punctuates consonant sounds with a robust "ahh") has been the unifying constant through countless shifts of personnel and stylistic flirtations, and so long as Smith's at the microphone slurring his caustic, cryptic lyrics the tenuously melodic chaos pulsing behind him will always fall into place.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—July 6: A triple bill of not quite novelty acts. The **Kings County Moonshiners** make revved-up Southern rock safe for Brooklynites; **Sam Champion** is a drum-and-guitar duo with a fondness for feedback and for the name of the Channel 7 weatherman; the **Zambonis** write snappy pop songs exclusively about hockey. July 8: While parodying the inherent ridiculousness of heavy metal is hardly groundbreaking nearly two decades after the advent of Spinal Tap, New Jersey's excellently named **Satanicide** amplify every possible cliché of the genre to maximum comic effect.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—July 2: **Lydia Lunch,** the irascible matriarch of No Wave agitation.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—July 2: Doowutchyalike! **Digital Underground** is back. July 3: **Basement Bhangra,** a long-running monthly party featuring ecstatic dance music that fuses an ancient Punjabi harvest festival with the technological wonders of underground London. July 5: The **Manhattan Samba** percussion ensemble is the driving force behind "Favela Funk," a weekly late-night (early-morning, actually—doors open at 2 A.M.) booty-shaking party that takes it name from the hot and sweaty Rio shantytowns. July 8: **Orchestra Baobab** (see Concerts—Central Park SummerStage). Dining.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—The pianist **Bill Charlap** can make any singer sound majestic, and here, through July 9, he gets to work his magic with his mother, **Sandy Stewart,** a knowing interpreter

of such standards as "My Coloring Book," which she took to the charts in the early sixties. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 4-5: While an active big band is rare enough these days, finding an all-female one is like landing a cab in midtown, at rush hour, in the rain, during a transit strike. **Sherrie Maricle & The Diva Jazz Orchestra** is a tough, supple, and jumping outfit that's both beaten the odds and gotten the last laugh. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through July 6: **Slide Hampton** is the trombone's best friend. As a composer, arranger, bandleader, and virtuoso performer, Hampton has always kept the instrument in the forefront of the action. Case in point is this engagement, which features fellow-trombonists **Bob Brookmeyer, Benny Powell, Bill Watrous,** and **Steve Davis,** aces all.

CAJUN
129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (212-691-6174)—Mondays and Thursdays: **Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks.** Manning the most unwieldy of instruments (bass, tuba, bass saxophone) as well as a bulbous vintage Kellogg microphone, Giordano leads a tuxedo-clad twelve-piece band whose ease with early jazz and swing breathes life into an overlooked era. Sundays: Michael Arenella's **Cantonement,** featuring the vocals of Bliss Blood. The rest of the week, combos fluent in Dixieland jazz and other improvisational sounds of New Orleans take the stage. Dining.

DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (212-265-8133)—July 4 and Saturdays and Sundays: The crystalline voice of **Blossom Dearie.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through July 6: The **Cannonball Adderley Legacy Band.** As long as the sound of a soulful saxophone continues to warm the heart, the legacy of the great altoist will endure, but it certainly doesn't hurt that such younger acolytes as the saxophonist **Vincent Herring** and the trumpeter **Jeremy Pelt** are intent on keeping this underrated giant's message alive. Joining them here is the Cannonball-vet drummer **Louis Hayes.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—July 3-5: A rash of exciting young pianists have been making big noise at the corner where Latin music and mainstream jazz intersect, but **Hilton Ruiz** was there before them all. He's a veteran whose roots stretch back to teen-age gigs with Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and his harmonic sophistication is only sharpened by his rhythmic aplomb. July 8 and Tuesdays throughout the month: The guitarist **Marvin Sewell,** formerly with Cassandra Wilson.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jazz foot soldiers rarely rise out of the trenches and make a show for themselves, but **Jerry Dodgion's** time has come. His Joy of Sax band turns the spotlight on a hardworking horn man who, for the past fifty-odd years, has fortified bands both big and small with his always thoughtful and often passionate playing. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZINC BAR
90 W. Houston St. (212-477-8337)—July 1-2: Somewhere between his hyped-up, late-eighties breakout with the Harper Brothers, and his now-decade-long freelance career, **Winard Harper** became a master drummer. Lighting up a bandstand with a smile that rivals that of the late Billy Higgins, Harper can also effortlessly lift a band much like that wizard of the skins. No matter who mans his sextet, Harper will give them no choice but to swing.

TABLES FOR TWO

WD-50
50 Clinton St. (212-477-2900)—Since everything at Wylie Dufresne's new place is so very just so, you have to assume the name is supposed to remind you of WD-40, the handyman's all-purpose product with the encouraging slogan: "There's always another use." It's certainly easy to picture the chef tinkering in his workshop: how else do you turn fresh oysters into a trompe-l'oeil marble rectangle on a plate? You may concede Dufresne's point—that his food would fit right in at an art gallery—but then you wonder, Is it really an appetizer?

Luckily, the chef has perfect pitch in the kitchen. Cherries hid under a red mullet in a peppery nasturtium sauce. The square of foie gras came with silver anchovy topping and raw cocoa nibs. In the artichoke soup, a tiny quail egg balanced on a thin crisp of chorizo. This sort of culinary adventurism can often feel forced, but Dufresne's touch is light, nuanced, and full of surprises. His octopus appetizer, for example, tasted like a grownup version of the flame-grilled hot dog—wistful, witty, a ballpark recollected in tranquillity.

Four big-party private booths line one wall, but the patrons in the center of the room are close enough to comparison shop. Peeking at a neighbor's plate, however, can be flummoxing. The spring chicken, which is first bound in mesh and marinated overnight, emerged from the kitchen looking like a pair of boccie balls and accompanied by a mysteriously round poached egg under a froth of "pumpernickel jus"—impossible to figure out without consulting a waiter, but delicious, and full of distinct mix-and-match flavors. Unfortunately, this do-you-get-it attitude loses something when it's extended to the rest rooms downstairs, where an expanse of blank wood wall cleverly disguises three unmarked and knobless doors. It can take minutes to realize that you have to push the wall—a Mensa-test experience so disconcerting that one diner wound up down the hall in a storeroom. Another made it in and then forgot to lock the door—probably not quite the see-and-be-seen experience that WD-50 is striving for. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $22-$28.)

—*Kevin Conley*

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—Viewers who didn't get enough Manet with their Velázquez can take solace in several seascapes inspired by an American Civil War battle waged off the coast of France. (Before becoming a painter, Manet sailed to Brazil on a cargo ship; he enrolled in art school after twice failing the Naval Academy entrance exam.) On June 19, 1864, the Confederacy's most successful raider, the C.S.S. Alabama, was sunk two hours after it launched a sneak attack on the U.S.S. Kearsarge. Manet painted the battle from imagination (abetted by news reports), then travelled to Boulogne-sur-Mer to paint a portrait of the victorious ship anchored there. Also on view are works by Whistler, Courbet, and Monet (all inspired by Manet), not to mention the captain's log and an elaborate model of the Kearsarge. Through Aug. 17. ♦ Factories are "our substitutes for religious expression," Charles Sheeler wrote in the twenties, and his photographs found the same Precisionist geometry in the flying buttresses of Chartres Cathedral and the blast furnaces of Ford Motor Company's River Rouge plant. Other standouts in this elegant survey of photographs—he took them to pay the bills, but they outshine his painting—are studies of his Pennsylvania farmhouse and the silent film "Manhatta," a collaboration with Paul Strand seeking a visual corollary to Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," often called the first avant-garde film in America. Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ After witnessing the atrocities of the First World

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Jonathan Franzen
Larissa MacFarquhar
Galway Kinnell
Rebecca Mead
Jeffrey Toobin
Edna O'Brien
V. S. Naipaul
Maira Kalman
and more

AND: A calendar of *New Yorker*
events across the country

"Wimbledon, 1968," a vintage print from the series "A Day Off," by Tony Ray-Jones, at Meyerowitz (see Photography).

War as a medic, the German painter Max Beckmann took up Expressionism to "reproach God for his errors." The museum recently acquired the famous "Hell" portfolio, eleven black-and-white lithographs that chronicle Beckmann's visit to Berlin in 1919 during the March Rebellion, when twelve hundred people were killed in two days. The original owner of the portfolio, the industrialist Hugo Stinnes, appears in a stinging caricature as a puppeteer dangling a marionette emperor, surrounded by human skulls and sacks of cash. This series' masterly balance between chaotic and carnivalesque is an amuse-bouche for the retrospective of the artist that opened last week at MOMA QNS. Through Aug. 31. ♦ A playful roof-garden sculpture—a painted aluminum cottage with a red roof, white and yellow walls, and a blue chimney—by Roy Lichtenstein, the late Pop artist, sits on its own little lawn with a sign warning viewers to keep off the grass. Through Nov. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)

33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—Back in 1964, when Andy Warhol began shooting his **"Screen Tests,"** a three-minute "live" portrait might have seemed like an amusing but slight conceit. Since then, the burgeoning influence of the format (cf. Thomas Struth's huge projected portraits recently exhibited at the Metropolitan), along with the explosion of reality media, has made those first performances look eerily prescient. They're also captivating, partly because Warhol chose so many charismatic and beautiful subjects, among them Dennis Hopper, Gerard Malanga, Edie Sedgwick, Salvador Dali, and "Baby" Jane Holzer, who does some of the sexiest toothbrushing imaginable. Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Max Beckmann."** Through Sept. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism"** is a concise, bewitching show of paintings, drawings, and sculptures—many of them making their first trip outside Russia—that vivify the artist's revolutionary art and ideas. His definitive "Black Square," from 1915, is in terrible physical shape; it suffered in Soviet archives during Malevich's long official suppression. A tragic air extends even to mint-condition Suprematist works, which, with deep roots in Western aesthetics and Russian mysticism, conjured a Utopia of matter-of-fact materiality and cerebral rapture. Malevich confidently claimed that he worked in five "measures," the fifth being "economy." In the spell of his grandiose and doomed optimism, one can well believe that or pretty much anything. This show is important to any general assessment of modern art. Through Sept. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—In this retrospective devoted to the works of Elie Nadelman, more than two hundred sculptures, arranged chronologically, trace the evolution of Nadelman's concerns: from his early busts, which speak to ancient ideals of beauty, to his jazz-era middle works, folksy wooden genre figures of dancers and circus performers with sinuous bodies and gessoed features, to his final postwar efforts, rows of plaster figurines that look like toy-size gods and monsters. Through July 20. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—Some notes on chocolate: to make a bar of dark chocolate, you need about twenty cacao seeds—a princely sum in the Aztec markets of pre-Columbian Mexico, where *cacahuatl* had been consumed since 600 B.C. A rain-forest midge no bigger than a capital letter on this page pollinates the cacao tree. Sugar was not added to chocolate until Spanish conquistadores imported it to Europe, and nearly all the chocolate produced in the U.S. during the Second World War was reserved for military use. Want more? The **"Chocolate"** show illustrates a cornucopia of ecological, technological, and cultural facts about the essential indulgence, with interactive exhibits, artifacts, and, of course, free samples. Through Sept. 7. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-517-2742)—As a prisoner during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Mu Xin secretly created a series of landscape paintings that portray his homeland as a sanctuary of **"Pure Mind and Colored Clouds."** Each of the thirty-four scenes, in gouache and Chinese ink on paper, is a prisoner's meditation, a way of inventing freedom while acknowledging the limits of incarceration. In works that manage to be dreamily realistic, considering the circumstances, Mu Xin expertly renders scenes that he could take in only in his mind's eye. "Moonlight at Pudong" highlights a backcountry lake in cool, celestial silver, and "Ancient Road at Shanyin" delivers a humid image of a tea-colored reflecting pool. The artist has never revealed his technique for these paintings (scholars have attributed his deeply layered grays, loamy browns, and scrubby greens to decalcomania or some other elaborate transfer process), but such detective work misses the point of his triumphantly escapist art. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11-6.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

1 Bowling Green (212-514-3700)—In the eighteen-nineties, many Native Americans took jobs as cowboys, ranchers, rodeo performers, and even Hollywood actors. **"Legends of Our Times"** showcases their contribution to the Wild West with a comprehensive display of talismans and practical tools, including an intricately beaded Oglala Lakota rawhide headstall (one of many ways to honor a horse), a turn-of-the-century Kutenai baby board, and video footage of Dennis Ghostkeeper riding a bull. Through March 7. (Open daily, 10-5; Thursday evenings until 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MARIKO MORI
A mammoth fibreglass teardrop (it looks like a U.F.O.) has taken up residence inside a public atrium at Madison and Fifty-seventh. Attractive young women in white uniforms fasten electrodes to your forehead while politely requesting that you replace your shoes with white cotton booties before ascending the steps to the capsule (shades of the final scene in "Close Encounters"). Once you're inside and equipped with earphones, a miasmic light show ensues, driven in part by your brain waves and delivering all the visual punch of a Lava lamp. Through July 31. (Public Art Fund, 590 Madison Ave. 212-980-3942.)

Short List

MAUREEN MC CABE
Kouros, 23 E. 73rd St. 212-288-5888.
Through Aug. 1.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

KAHN & SELESNICK
In the visionary, ersatz world of Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick, sprawling tales of historical anomaly and derring-do are represented in staged photographs, fantastical narrative texts, and artificial artifacts. "City of Salt," their most recent confection of pseudo-anthropology, casts the duo, who always appear in their own images, as characters from an "Arabian Nights"-like story cycle. Delicately tinted digital photographs are accompanied by a miniature city whose minarets rise up from the gallery floor, while wall texts speak of pomegranates, egrets, kif, and wadis, but also "mechanic camels" and "nine brothers of business who came from Western lands." Through July 3. (Yancey Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

DONNA MOYLAN
Executed in oils on unsized wooden panels, their imagery organized around the wiggly concentric lines of the wood grain, Moylan's paintings depict a world best described as apocalyptic cartoon pastoral. Pours and washes of loose color fume at the horizon; they could be sunset clouds or bloody explosions. Tiny army men and helicopters hide amid passages of bravura abstraction, whose baroque grandeur is undercut not only by the cute bits of Armageddon strewn about but by the thinness of the paint and the canvas support showing through the image. Through Aug. 1. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

DO-HO SUH
A full-scale replica of the artist's unfurnished studio apartment, meticulously stitched from pastel fabric (every hinge, outlet, and light switch is in place), floats in the center of the gallery like a diaphanous memory of home. (It also suggests that recurring dream peculiar to New Yorkers, in which cramped longtime apartments mysteriously reveal extra rooms.) The term "soft sculpture" is too substantial to convey the delicacy of Suh's creation, though the sight of a floppy toilet can't help but ring a Claes Oldenburg bell. Through July 11. (Lehman Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

Short List

SUZANNE BOCANEGRA
Schoormans, 508 W. 26th St. 212-243-3159.
Through July 5.

ISAAC JULIEN
Bohen Foundation, 415 W. 13th St.
212-414-4575. Through Aug. 1.

KARA WALKER
Sikkema, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.
Through July 25.

GALLERIES—SOHO

RÓZA EL-HASSAN
Tangled tendrils of wire spill across the gallery floor onto the sidewalk like a line drawing sprung to life. But the promise isn't fulfilled by this installation that marks the New York début of a Budapest-based artist. The mood is generically political—a cluster of peace signs hang above a drawing with a photo of Arafat; a text by El-Hassan on the aesthetics of demonstrations is draped over the rung of a ladder—but there's a scattershot aspect that may have been intended to harness the energy of a work in progress but instead just feels incomplete. Through July 26. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166.)

"DUST MEMORIES"
What the press release touts as "the residue of reality" and most of us just call dust is both material and subject for the artists in this group show. Works by established artists (a Lawrence Weiner wall text, an Ed Ruscha gunpowder drawing) are installed alongside those of newcomers like Dario Robleto, whose game of marbles sits on a ring of dust purportedly ground from human and dinosaur femurs. Don't miss the peephole drilled in the wall by Jean Dupuy, a pioneer of the sixties art-and-technology movement. As dust crackles under a turntable needle, motes shine in the darkness like wayward stars. Through Aug. 2. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway. 212-925-2035.)

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

GIBB SLIFE
The artist's début show includes three large oil paintings of instruments of power—a crown, a sceptre, the bejewelled hilt of a sword—and a sculpture of a Saint Sebastian-like mannequin pierced by a quiverful of arrows. Slife, a member of this magazine's staff, has applied latter-day techniques (portrait settings, ad-image lighting, Photo-Realist detail) to invoke a medieval sense of awe. Through July 26. (Kontiki, 653 Metropolitan Ave. 212-334-9255.)

"OUTPOST"
Orange power cords uncoil slowly, like snakes, in Greg Simsic's multi-monitor installation, Amy Barkow sets up a little camera transmitting live feed from the nonspace behind a wall, and the collaborative group E-team integrates viewers into a billboard-size projected desert landscape. In other words, "Outpost" stands at the point where video meets sculpture. But digitization is just a tool here—the collective subject is "interactivity" in the good old-fashioned sense of minds perceiving and reacting to objects. Best is Joe McKay's "Colour Game," a low-tech, hands-on cross between Nintendo and Josef Albers' color squares. Through July 20. (Smack Mellon Studios, 56 Water St. 718-834-8761.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

TONY RAY-JONES
Although Ray-Jones is well known in Britain, he has yet to be discovered here other than by hard-core aficionados of street photography. His first show on this side of the Atlantic in about ten years offers a set of vintage prints from his project "A Day Off." His own blend of wit, tenderness, and irony was a perfect match for the late-sixties British culture that he photographed: kitschy holiday resorts, uptight ballroom-dance schools, and the disorderly edges of orderly parades are simultaneously embraced and mocked. His exploration of British cheekiness and patriotism makes him the founder of a tradition that Martin Parr, Paul Graham, Nick Wapplington, and others have continued. Through July 11. (Meyerowitz, 120 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-2770.)

BORDERS. Words on Music

Borders' World Music specialist Erika Grande says:
"Here's an album any Gipsy Kings or guitar fan would enjoy, from one of the most accomplished Flamenco players today. Baliardo's agility is astonishing and flawless."

Tonino Baliardo

NONESUCH

Gipsy Kings' lead guitarist **Tonino Baliardo**,
whose virtuosic playing style can range from insinuating to incendiary,
has anchored that band's Flamenco-based sound for their entire career.
Baliardo makes his solo debut with a self-titled collection
of instrumentals whose "relaxed virtuosity" *(N.Y. Times)*
mixes a rustic tradition with contemporary jazz and Latin-inflected
arrangements on 12 original compositions.

BORDERS.
BOOKS MUSIC MOVIES CAFE

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"Cuba on the Verge." Abelardo Morell, who left Cuba with his family forty years ago, when he was fourteen, is well known for his camera-obscura images of cityscapes and industrial areas, flipped and fuzzy on apartment and hotel walls. His exposures last up to eight hours, and pictures made on a recent trip to Cuba carry an emotional weight, a sense of loss and of feeling trapped, at which his other work can only hint. Other photographers, like Virginia Beahan and Carrie Mae Weems, reach similar heights, whether looking at history or Afro-Cuban identity. The show also gives the opportunity to see work by other, lesser-known Cuban artists, notably Manuel Piña's lushly colored crumbling walls in Havana, Abigail Gonzáles's moments of sexual joy, and René Peña's black-and-white images of handwritten letters sent by Cubans to family members abroad, often asking for financial assistance. These works speak clearly of the conundrums and fleeting pleasures of living today in Fidel Castro's experiment. Through Aug. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

"AFTERNOON DELIGHT"
As a curatorial premise, "women in photography now" has been done. But "Afternoon Delight" achieves a satisfying summer-group-show blend of dreamy longueurs and crackerjack technique. Justine Kurland's pubescent sirens lounging on river rocks, Miranda Lichtenstein's creepy-beautiful gardens, and the saturated abstraction of Liz Deschenes—who seems to photograph in sheer color—are simultaneously exciting and soothing to look at, like the ocean on a hot day. Also included are works by Katharina Bosse, Moyra Davey, Jitka Hanzlova, Aura Rosenberg, Alexandra Rowley, and Judith Turner. Through July 25. (Golden, 526 W. 26th St. 212-727-8304.)

"INSIDE OUT"
Interior photography often veers toward a dry-as-dust celebration of the banal, but this small group show breaks with tradition and presents uninhabited public places—waiting rooms, hotels, cafés—in rich color and with a looming sense of drama. Speaking of drama, wasn't Sara Gilbert, who has two pieces in the show, Roseanne Barr's daughter in an earlier life? Her pictures of movie and TV sets tweak the interior shot: "Studio City, Work #3" seems to be a house seen from the outside, but it's an electrical-taped fake on a back lot. Jake Chessum's spooky waiting room, with perfectly spaced ashtrays and blood-red carpeting, and Lisa Kereszi's hotel-room bathroom, with its two lonely washcloths over a robin's-egg-blue sink, owe a debt to Alfred Hitchcock. Through July 25. (Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 212-727-2752.)

Short List

JEAN-LUC MYLAYNE
Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.
Through Aug. 15.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

"MUSIC IN THE GARDEN"
The Church of the Holy Trinity, an Episcopal congregation on the Upper East Side, likes to follow its Wednesday-evening summer services with an hour-long outdoor concert. The Avila-Alexander-Huter Piano Trio leads off the series; its all-Schumann program, like every garden concert, will be preluded by a bit of carillon music from the church's bell tower. Picnic dinners are available for purchase. (316 E. 88th St. July 2 at 7:15. A donation is suggested.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA
Vincent La Selva's great gift to the city's summer scene has been to present the most traditional operatic repertory—the music of Verdi, Puccini, and the little masters of the verismo school—in novel ways. (And it doesn't hurt that he has a more natural command of Italianate style than almost any conductor in New York.) He begins his thirtieth summer season in Central Park (now, thankfully, moved from the rather cramped SummerStage into the wide open space of the East Meadow) with a fully staged production of Puccini's **"La Bohème,"** which will be followed a month later by Leoncavallo's rarely performed treatment of the same story. The Puccini production, directed by Roberto Stivanello, will feature Maria Knapik, Pablo Veguilla, Susan Groeschel, and Constantinus Yannoudis. (Enter at Fifth Ave. and 97th St. July 2 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

"MADE IN THE U.S.A.": RUTH LAREDO
Another Trinity Church—the landmark at Broadway and Wall Street—begins its own round of summer concerts, a ten-week celebration of American music. Laredo, whose repertory favors American Romantics almost as much as their European forebears, opens the series with a program of Gershwin, Barber (the eloquent Sonata, Op. 26), Bolcom, Rorem, Gottschalk, and Zez Confrey ("Kitten on the Keys"), the Midwestern light-jazz master who seems to be enjoying a revival these days. (July 3 at 1. No tickets required.)

Mark E. Smith brings his band the Fall to the Knitting Factory (see Night Life).

STEPHEN KRONINGER

BRONX ARTS ENSEMBLE
The ensemble, along with the vocalist Cathy Gale, celebrates Independence Day with a concert salute to George M. Cohan, whose music (in arrangements by Jack Gale) shares the program with selections by Berlin, Rodgers, Ellington, and others. (Rockwood Drive Circle, Van Cortlandt Park, the Bronx. July 4 at 2. No tickets required. For further information, call 718-601-7399.)

BARGEMUSIC
July 3-4 at 7:30: The violinist Mark Peskanov spends Independence Day at the barge, teaming up with the pianist Steven Beck to perform music by Gershwin (the Heifetz arrangements of selections from "Porgy and Bess" and the solo-piano version of "Rhapsody in Blue") and sonatas by Copland and Keith Jarrett. ♦ July 5 at 7:30 and July 6 at 4: The pianist Shai Wosner and the cellist Edward Arron join Peskanov in a concert of Beethoven's Three Piano Trios, Op. 1. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
The pianist Joel Fan offers a program of Bach, Beethoven, Gershwin, and others at Le Refuge Inn, a French-style country inn nestled among the yacht slips and shore restaurants of City Island. (620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. 212-724-4474. July 6 at 12:30.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
This year's series of free summertime concerts (conducted by Roberto Minczuk) begins in Staten Island, with the orchestra joined by the Brazilian chanteuse Luciana Souza; a São Paolo native, she's known mostly for her soft renderings of jazz and bossa-nova standards, but her lilting soprano is equally at home with classical works by Villa-Lobos or Golijov. She sings Falla's Gypsy melodrama "El Amor Brujo" in a program that also includes music by Mozart and Fauré. (Snug Harbor Cultural Center. July 6 at 8.) ♦ Minczuk returns to conduct an all-Russian program featuring works by Borodin, Tchaikovsky (the Violin Concerto, with James Ehnes), and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition"). (Great Lawn, Central Park. July 7 at 8. ♦ Prospect Park, Brooklyn. July 8 at 8.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL: KIROV OPERA
Valery Gergiev and his company's performances at the Met, while intended to celebrate the three-hundredth birthday of the city of St. Petersburg, might also show why New York needs Lincoln Center more than ever. The company's slate of six operas (including "Eugene Onegin," "The Demon," and "The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh") is dazzling to the point of disbelief—some of these pieces never travel outside Russia. One can only hope that they'll be conducted by the energized, charismatic Gergiev, not the erratically engaged phantom twin who seems to have led so many of his recent performances at the house. The Kirov residency begins with a genuine curiosity: the North American première of Prokofiev's **"Semyon Kotko,"** the composer's first attempt at satisfying the hungry maw of socialist realism. (It's a simple love story set against the backdrop of the post-revolutionary civil war.) The piece may be bombastic, even crude, but this modern production, which has earned praise abroad, will certainly round out our picture of an enormously gifted but stupendously unlucky composer. The cast includes Tatiana Pavlovskaya, Irina Loskutova, and Victor Lutsiuk (in the title role). (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. July 8 at 7.)

NAUMBURG ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS
Charles Neidich is the guest soloist for a free concert of Mozart (the Clarinet Concerto and the "Jupiter" Symphony) and Prokofiev. Sarah Ioannides conducts. (Damrosch Park Bandshell, Lincoln Center. July 8 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

JOHN CAGE'S "FOUR WALLS"
This very early work (from 1944), a "dance-drama" on the subject of the "disturbed mind" that Cage wrote (on the white keys of the piano) for Merce Cunningham, is the cornerstone of Haydée Schvartz's piano concert, which will also include a set of music by Debussy along with selections from Yvar Mikhashoff's International Tango Collection. (Tonic, 107 Norfolk St. 212-979-1027. July 8 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

BERKSHIRE OPERA COMPANY
The company concludes its performances of a semi-staged **"La Traviata,"** with Maureen O'Flynn, John Bellemer, William Stone, and John Cheek; Joel Revzen conducts. (Chapin Hall, Williams College, Williamstown, Mass. 413-442-0099. July 2 at 8.)

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL
July 3 at 6: The young pianist Benita Meshulam delves into her Sephardic background, offering a concert of Falla, Albéniz, and other Spanish composers. ♦ July 4 at 6: It's not every day that you hear a wind quintet playing jazz favorites, but that's part of the fare on Windscape's program "The Fabulous Fifties," which, along with numbers by Davis ("So What") and Ellington, includes music by Carter, Bernstein, and Westchester's own Samuel Barber ("Summer Music"). ♦ July 5 at 8: The inimitable Andrea Marcovicci, with her pianist and arranger Shelly Markham, sings "So in Love," a evening of Cole Porter standards. ♦ July 6 at 4:30: The ladies and gentlemen of the Orchestra of St. Luke's perform a clutch of Vivaldi concertos for strings and winds. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
New York City Opera's sister company, the usual source for the most imaginative and ably sung operatic performances of the summer, likes to offer a mix of familiar and exotic works in productions that tend to favor a deft, light touch. July 3 at 8 and July 6 at 2: Francisco Negrin's new production of **"Don Giovanni"** features the company début of the Danish baritone Palle Knudsen in the title role, leading a cast that also includes Maria Kanyova, Amy Burton, Kyle Ketelsen, and John McVeigh; Stewart Robertson conducts. ♦ July 5 at 8 and July 7 at 2: French opéra bouffe, a speciality of the house, arrives in the form of a new production (by Christopher Alden) of Offenbach's **"Bluebeard,"** a treatment of the immortal tale that should be a shade more frivolous than Bartók's. With Tracey Welborn, Phyllis Pancella, and Anthony Laciura; Gerald Steichen. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

TANGLEWOOD
July 4 at 7: The summer season, a vibrant array of classical, contemporary, and pops performances by a retinue of favorite artists who never seem to age, begins with an evening of Motown hits delivered by the Supremes (featuring Mary Wilson) and the Spinners' brand of Philly soul, with fireworks to follow. The grounds open for family entertainment at 2. ♦ July 5 at 8:30: "Opening Night at Tanglewood," a concert of Prokofiev (the cantata "Alexander Nevsky") and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition," in the very Russian orchestration by Gorchakov) performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. Kurt Masur conducts. ♦ July 6 at 2:30: James DePreist conducts the orchestra in music by Svoboda, Beethoven (the Triple Concerto, with the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio), and Rachmaninoff (the Second Symphony). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

ASTON MAGNA
The renowned early-music band begins its summer series with "The Birth of the String Quartet," in which the origins of the Classical form par excellence are explored though music by Allegri, Telemann, and Scarlatti along with early works by Haydn (the "Joke" Quartet) and Mozart. (Olin Hall, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7425. July 4 at 8.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
Each summer the faculty of the Yale School of Music decamps to the carefully tended grounds of the Ellen Battell Stoeckel estate for two months of teaching and concertizing; most events are given in the estate's Music Shed, a noble, wood-lined venue that once hosted the likes of Rachmaninoff and Sibelius. July 4 at 8: The Gryphon Trio and eighth blackbird, both zealous advocates for young composers, perform world-première works by the students of the school's advanced composition seminar (including Orianna Webb and Nathan Williamson). ♦ July 5 at 8: The Gryphons have the stage to themselves for a program of piano trios by Haydn, Dvořák, and Shostakovich. (Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000.)

OPERA FESTIVAL OF NEW JERSEY
July 5 at 8: Rossini's **"L'Italiana in Algeri,"** with the Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano Maria Zifchak leading a cast that also includes Eduardo Chama, Michael Colvin, and Tonna Miller; Daniel Beckwith conducts. ♦ July 6 at 2: Tchaikovsky's **"Eugene Onegin,"** with Frédérique Vézina, Stephen Powell, Jennifer Hines, and Richard Clement; Dean Williamson. ♦ July 8 at 7:30: In a departure from the festival's conservative traditions, its artistic director, David Agler, conducts Berg's **"Wozzeck"** (the final production of the repertory season) in the American première of a new chamber-orchestra edition of the score. Daniel Sutin (in the title role), Marjorie Elinor Dix, John Easterlin, and Dale Travis are featured in the cast. **Note:** A three-hour pre-concert symposium on the opera, with presentations by Carl Schorske, John Rockwell, Alex Ross, and Mark Anderson, will precede the opera at 4; tickets must be purchased separately. (Princeton, N.J. 866-636-5858. Through July 19.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
July 5 at 8: Best known for lively renditions of Scottish jigs and reels, the Celtic trio Ferintosh (violin, cello, and Irish harp) offers traditional folk music with the stylistic precision of an early-music band. ♦ July 6 at 3: The Ying Quartet performs music by Mozart and Bartok (the Quartet No. 2) along with the Piano Quintet by Shostakovich (with Elinor Freer). (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
July 5 at 8: The Amernet String Quartet, with the violist Eric Shumsky, performs three Mozart string quintets. ♦ July 6 at 3: Music by Haydn, Beethoven, and Franck (the Piano Quintet, with Mihae Lee), offered by the Manhattan String Quartet. (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

THE WEEKEND OF CHAMBER MUSIC
The Brentano String Quartet visits this occasional festival in the foothills of the Catskills, run by the flautist Judith Pearce, to perform works by Bach, Haydn, Dvořák, and Arthur Foote ("Night Piece," with Pearce joining in). (Hortonville Presbyterian Church, Hortonville, N.Y. 845-932-8414. July 5 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

INDEPENDENCE DAY
As the nation's collective waistline has ballooned, one sport has expanded to match. Under the auspices of the International Federation of Competitive Eating, you can gobble bratwurst in Hanover, crawfish in Baton Rouge, and conch fritters in Key West. But on the gluttony circuit, Nathan's Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating Contest remains the Super Bowl of eat-a-thons. This year the ex-N.F.L. star William (The Refrigerator) Perry has a contest berth, and he'll face the two-time defending champion Takeru Kobayashi. Even though he weighs in at a hundred and thirty pounds, Kobayashi is no lightweight—last year he downed fifty and a half dogs in twelve minutes. (1310 Surf Ave., Coney Island, Brooklyn. July 4 at noon.) ♦ In the annual Macy's spectacular, fireworks will launch from both the traditional East River location off Thirty-fourth Street and below the South Street Seaport. (The fireworks hot line is 212-494-4495; the rockets go off shortly after 9.)

READINGS
July 6 at 3: The novelists Amy Herrick and Blake Nelson read from their new works, and the photographer Carolina Salguero presents a slide show of life on New York Harbor tugboats. (Sunny's, 253 Conover St. 718-625-8211.) ♦ July 7 at 7: The Astoria-based literary journal *Pindeldyboz* hosts readings by Darin Strauss and Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine, as well as a celebrity auction with items donated by the likes of Dave Eggers and Rick Moody. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. For reservations, call 212-533-7000.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Giving Direction

Margaret Croyden's **CONVERSATIONS WITH PETER BROOK, 1970-2000** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) addresses the work of the man who's been called "the most important contemporary theatre director in the West." When Brook founded the International Center of Theatre Research, in Paris in 1970, he wanted a theatre company "that would offer a fusion of cultures, temperaments, styles, and backgrounds." The Center's highly experimental projects have included a nine-hour production of "The Mahabharata" and "Orghast," a treatment of the Prometheus myth performed amid the ruins of Persepolis in an incomprehensible language invented by Ted Hughes. Brook insists that he has "never believed in any theatre sect, any theatre line, or any theatre theory whatsoever," but he remains uncompromising in his view of what theatre should be: "The theatre is there as food for higher perceptions. It's through the theatre that the faculty for perceiving more vividly can be matched."

RICHARD McGUIRE

In **THE CRAFTY ART OF PLAYMAKING** (Palgrave), the veteran writer-director Alan Ayckbourn defines theatre direction as "the art of responding to the needs of others." Often, this is collaborative: in his view, "a choice made by the actor is worth five imposed by the director." For the most part, Ayckbourn restricts himself to practical advice in a series of "Obvious Rules" covering every conceivable aspect of the production—from "Obvious Rule No. 51: Beware the manic-depressive costume designer" to "Obvious Rule No. 87: If you can't hold your liquor, never drink with actors." Violate that last rule at your own risk: "Directors tend rapidly to lose their credibility once they've got hopelessly drunk and been carried home to bed, having made a pass at half the cast or been sick on their shoes," he writes.

—*Leo Carey*

MOVIES OPENING

GASOLINE
A lesbian couple take to the road after a fatal accident. Monica Stambrini directed. In Italian. Opening July 2. (Quad Cinema.)

LEGALLY BLONDE 2: RED, WHITE & BLONDE
Reese Witherspoon returns as Elle Woods, the golden-tressed Harvard-trained lawyer, in a sequel to the 2001 comedy. With Luke Wilson, Bob Newhart, and Sally Field. Opening July 2.

SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS
The adventures of the swashbuckling pirate are brought to the big screen in an animated movie from Dreamworks. With voices by Brad Pitt, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Joseph Fiennes. Opening July 2.

SWIMMING POOL
François Ozon ("8 Women") directed this drama about the prickly relationship between a British mystery writer (Charlotte Rampling) and her publisher's French teen-age daughter (Ludivine Sagnier), who shows up unexpectedly at a house in the South of France. In French and English. Opening July 2.

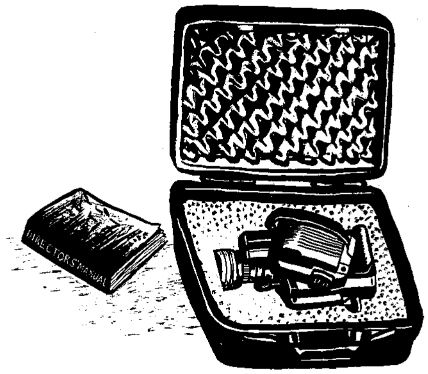
TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES
In the third installment of the sci-fi series, the original Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) helps the savior of mankind, John Connor (Nick Stahl), fight a new female cyborg from the future, the T-X (Kristanna Loken). Also with Claire Danes. Directed by Jonathan Mostow. Opening July 2.

FILM NOTES

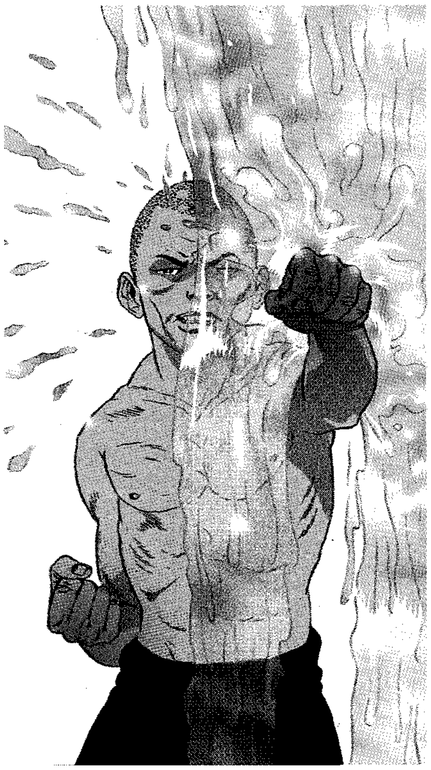
L'ATALANTE
To miss out on this movie should be a civil offense punishable by law. It has often been acclaimed as the masterwork of the French director Jean Vigo, although his admirers would politely point out that masterworks were all he was capable of making. The story tells of a pair of newlyweds who spend their honeymoon travelling down the Seine toward Paris and the sea. In some inexplicable way, it feels like the complete portrait of a marriage. We get sulks, stabs of jealousy, complicit smiles in the morning, and moments of desire that startle even now; how they must have looked in 1934, goodness only knows. If the couple's senses are lit by love, Vigo's are on fire, and the film remains an astonishing exploration of texture, from its famous shots of the bride, in the brilliant white of her wedding dress, stepping along the fog-slicked darkness of the boat, to the husband's wild searchings for her beneath the Seine. With a rude and rasping Michel Simon as the ship's mate—an animal answer to the lyrical longings elsewhere. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Gramercy Theatre.)

L'AUBERGE ESPAGNOLE
The title of Cédric Klapisch's film means, in French slang, a free-for-all. This charming, utterly undramatic sketchbook movie is about a twenty-five-year-old Parisian graduate student, Xavier (Romain Duris), who goes to Spain as part of a European exchange program and lives with a polyglot mix of students in a cramped walkup apartment. The hero is instructed in lovemaking techniques by a lesbian roommate; he then has an affair with a luscious but vacuous married woman (Judith Godrèche). Not much happens, but the characters, searching for romance and good times, wander through Barcelona's handsome ochre streets, across the Gaudi pavilions and the sun-drenched piazzas; the movie is as much a love letter to the slowed-down erotic pleasures of the city as the New Wave films were to the endless social and intellectual enchantments of Paris. In English, French, Danish, Spanish, and Catalan.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/19/03.) (Kew Gardens Cinema, New York Twin, and Union Square.)

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM
A crowd-pleasing British movie devoted to the radical idea that girls can play soccer and sprain their ankles. Jess (Parminder Nagra) is a Sikh who hides her love of the game from her conservative parents, while Jules (Keira Knightley) is a tomboy who defies her English mother. Both have a thing for their Irish coach, Joe (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers)—he of the wounded knee and the watery eyes. The movie is a hodgepodge: nicely barbed scenes with Jess's family bump against weird practice montages that play like sports-bra ads. What it all adds up to is multicultural empowerment for the pre-teen shin-guard crowd.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)



BONHOEFFER
A documentary, directed by Martin Doblmeier, about the life, times, and eventual fate of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran minister who was imprisoned by the Nazis and hanged in 1945. Interest in Bonhoeffer shows no sign of abating, not least because his practicality and rootedness—and the struggle, which intensified in his last months, to reforge the role of faith in the world—demand that we engage with his example rather than simply revere it. The film is straightforward, and no less affecting for that; we are led through the chronology of Bonhoeffer's life, including his two trips to America, and even shown the code by which family members smuggled messages into his cell. As far as talking heads go, there are perhaps too many commentators; happily, however, they are outclassed by Bonhoeffer's contemporaries, including his close friend Eberhard Bethge. The voiceover, for the readings from Bonhoeffer's books and letters, is by Klaus Maria Brandauer.—*A.L.* (6/30/03) (Quad Cinema.)


Liu Chia-liang's "The 36th Chamber of Shaolin," at the Walter Reade Theatre.

TOMER HANUKA

BRUCE ALMIGHTY
Jim Carrey as an all-powerful being? Please, God, no. In this underwhelming comedic parable, Carrey is the titular Bruce, a "wacky" Buffalo newscaster who is granted dominion over his home town by God (Morgan Freeman in a white suit). Half-baked comic conceits can sometimes be saved by inspired performances, but no one besides Carrey seems to be having much fun, and he's relying on his goofy faces again. The movie's subtext refers to Carrey's own career: his character uses his powers to become an anchor and do "serious news," but then decides that making people laugh is just as worthy. Fair enough, but the laughs never arrive. With Jennifer Aniston, who looks frightened most of the time.—*M.A.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

CABIN IN THE SKY
This was the first film Vincente Minnelli directed, and his approach was fresh and enthusiastic. It's a joyful, stylized treatment of faux-naïf Negro folklore, with an all-black cast, and it's one of the best musicals ever made in this country. This 1943 picture has become even better with the years: now it's easier to ignore the weaknesses in the script, because it's so exciting to see legendary artists, such as Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong, and Bubbles (John William Sublett), as they were in the forties. The slinky dancing of Bubbles (to the song "Shine") is a high point, so is Ethel Waters singing "Happiness Is Just a Thing Called Joe," and so is Lena Horne in "Honey in the Honeycomb." The cast includes Eddie (Rochester) Anderson, Rex Ingram, Kenneth Spencer, Mantan Moreland, Willie Best, Duke Ellington and his orchestra, and the Hall Johnson Choir.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; July 8.)

CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS
Andrew Jarecki's startling documentary offers an approach to truth as richly nuanced but ultimately as futile as Kurosawa's great "Rashomon." In 1987, in Great Neck, Long Island, the police arrested a beloved retired schoolteacher, Arnold Friedman, and his son Jesse on the charge of sexually abusing the young boys who regularly gathered at the Friedman home for computer lessons. Jarecki interviews the police, the attorneys, the judge, and the alleged victims in the case, but the heart of the movie is the family's own footage: the layers of Friedman home movies and stills and the voluminous videos shot by David Friedman, the oldest Friedman boy, throughout the crisis. The two accused men were part of a loving family of five, although Mrs. Friedman, emotionally stranded by her husband, was not part of the jokes and the camaraderie. Before our astounded eyes the entire fantastic mess unfolds like a bloody Greek legend—the House of Atreus reincarnated in a middle-class Jewish family. Edited by Richard Hankin.—*D.D.* (6/2/03) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3, Kew Gardens Cinema, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

LE CERCLE ROUGE
In this deluxe piece of heist-film engineering from 1970, the writer-director Jean-Pierre Melville provides a satisfying payoff for the audience, if not the characters—according to the hardboiled karma of the plot, everyone winds up philosophical or dead. Just released ex-con Alain Delon and escaped prisoner Gian-Maria Volonté take turns saving each other's life and then enlist marksman Yves Montand to help them pull off a Paris jewelry-store robbery. Bourvil is the inspector on their trail, and François Périer the well-connected owner of an irresistible gangland night club. Volonté's juicy wildness as a self-proclaimed "amateur" and Montand's blowsy authority as an alcoholic help lubricate the plot; the lizards and insects of Montand's delirium-tremens scene presage "Celebrity Fear Factor." And with the help of the cinematographer Henri Decaë, Melville puts on a virtuoso dis-

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play of the geometry of movie action, from the red circle of chalk Delon uses on a pool cue to the slashing lines he cuts in his blocky American car. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinema.)

CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

FINDING NEMO

The latest flood of wizardry from Pixar, whose productions, from "Toy Story" onward, have lent an indispensable vigor and wit to the sagging art of mainstream animation. Whether the new movie, directed by Andrew Stanton, will add much to that resuscitation is another matter. Albert Brooks provides the voice of Marlin, a non-amusing clown fish who sees his young son, Nemo, borne off in a diver's net. Not to be daunted, and plainly unfazed by the threat of both sharks and sentimentality, Marlin sets off to rescue his only child. You'll never guess how it ends. The technical skill on show is beyond question, but, as yet another computer-generated seascape ripples past, you may be tempted to ask whether that skill is driving the story; Marlin just drifts from one semi-heroic feat to the next, and the characters seldom get their hooks, or their jaws, into you with the pointed, snippy comedy that we have come to associate with Woody and Buzz Lightyear. Also, not to be impolite or anything, but how expressive is a fish, until it hits a grill? With the voices of Geoffrey Rush, Barry Humphries, Willem Dafoe, Allison Janney, and—the funniest of the shoal—Ellen DeGeneres.—*A.L.* (6/9/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

FRIDAY NIGHT

A woman (Valérie Lemercier) in Paris preparing to move in with her boyfriend the next morning gets stuck in a traffic jam, allows a strange man (Vincent Lindon) into her car, and goes to bed with him in a hotel without exchanging more than a few words. The movie is about a momentary connection made in the night, but the director Claire Denis's technique, which depends on non-continuous cutting, produces disconnection. In the end, not much happens between these two. The movie is dark-toned and rather furtive, its emotional transactions attenuated to the point of nullity. A perfect one-night stand is no doubt a familiar fantasy, but this movie has been made without fantasy. In French.—*D.D.* (6/16 & 23/03) (Quad Cinema.)

HOLLYWOOD HOMICIDE

Yet another comedy about mismatched cops who learn to love and respect each other. This time, it's a creaky Harrison Ford as the stubbled veteran and a low-wattage Josh Hartnett as the eager rookie. Ron Shelton's script and direction are lacklustre—the agreeable manly banter of some of his previous films is missing. In its place are all of the hallmarks of formula filmmaking: the endless chases, the sophomoric quips, and the myriad urban stereotypes.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

HULK

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

THE ITALIAN JOB

Edward Norton, pulling his chin down and showing off a mean spot of beard, acts the mild and recessive Mark Wahlberg off the screen in this elaborate international heist movie about bad and good gold thieves. As a piece of summer-season craftsmanship the movie is fine: the camera rises majestically over the Dolomites, and in Venice, speedboats churn up the canals and head into blind turns. There's a dangerous-looking chase in which a small black helicopter hovers right over a car in the streets of Los Angeles, and the director F. Gary Gray uses a fleet of buzzing, squared-off Minis extremely well, shooting the tiny cars into a subway tunnel just ahead of a train, making them jump and spin and flip like toys. Don't expect much more, however, than a pleasant workout. Seth Green and Mos Def are very funny in minor roles. With the creamy Charlize Theron as the daughter of master criminal Donald Sutherland.—*D.D.* (6/16 & 23/03) (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE LOWER DEPTHS

Jean Renoir's 1936 version of the Maxim Gorky play features those two magnetic poles of French acting—Louis Jouvet, as the gambling baron who sinks to living in a flophouse, and Jean Gabin, as the thief trying to climb up to a different life. Their scenes together are gems of the French film tradition. The fine cast includes Le Vigan as an actor, Jany Holt as a prostitute with aspirations toward love with sentiment, and Junie Astor, Suzy Prim, and Vladimir Sokoloff. This movie has one of those emblematic moments that people talk about for years afterward: Jouvet, having lost everything, comes away from the gaming tables and can't light his cigarette. This scene was, for the thirties, what Belmondo rubbing his lips in "Breathless" was for the sixties. In French.—*P.K.* (Gramercy Theatre; July 5.)

MAN ON THE TRAIN

The French director Patrice Leconte, having flitted from one genre to the next with movies as different as "Ridicule" and "The Girl on the Bridge," has now settled on his most consoling subject: the comedy of good companionship. Johnny Hallyday (who was, in his time, France's answer to Elvis) plays Milan, a low-level hit man who arrives, at the bluish end of a day, in a small French town and accepts the offer of a room from Manesquier (Jean Rochefort), a retired schoolteacher. For an hour, not much happens, and we are granted the languorous—and, to many filmgoers, increasingly rare—pleasure of watching two people lock gently together. They even trade roles: Rochefort, the most playful melancholic in cinema, learns to fire a gun, while Hallyday takes up pipe and slippers. All of this is delectable: Leconte has a taste for minor, chewed-up lives, and you can't help sighing with regret as he gathers his wits and hurries the plot toward an unnecessary climax. In French.—*A.L.* (5/12/03) (Cinema Village, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

ON THE BEACH

Linus Pauling was quoted as saying, "It may be that some years from now we can look back and say that 'On the Beach' is the movie that saved the world." The greatest ability of the director, Stanley Kramer, may have been for eliciting fatuous endorsements from eminent people. This cautionary tale, released in 1959, brings together a group of stars and puts them on the littoral of Australia to await the lethal hydrogen-bomb cloud that has wiped out the rest of the world's population. Gregory Peck plays the commander of an American submarine with his customary relentless dignity, even when he's cuddling up with Ava Gardner, a lovable wildflower "who has lived too hard and drunk too much." Anthony Perkins, one of the submarine officers, gangles, and wrestles, wet-eyed, with the problem of whether to give suicide pills to his wife (Donna Anderson) and child; Fred Astaire is a civilian scientist who explains the disaster by saying that somebody has pulled a boner. Somebody has; his initials are S.K.—*P.K.* (Thalia Theatre; July 5-6.)

SPELLBOUND

Jeffrey Blitz's charming documentary follows eight elementary students competing in the 1999 National Spelling Bee; he rode the bus to school with them, interviewed their teachers, checked out their rooms, and, in one case, listened while a kid talked like a robot. The sample of children is appropriately diverse—in region, in race, in the intensity of their preparations. Some of their parents see the spelling bee as representing the immigrant dream of America in miniature, while others seem amazed at the intensity of their nerdy offspring. The competitions are tense, and Blitz cobbles together a series of heartbreaking reaction shots of errant spellers. His direction shows a clever, occasionally flippant selection of detail—the dog-eared unabridged dictionaries, the congratulatory sign posted outside Hooters, the prodigy who signs his autographs "Trust in Jesus."—*M.A.* (Cinema 2, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Quad Cinema, 62nd & Broadway.)

THE 36TH CHAMBER OF SHAOLIN

The martial-arts movie director Liu Chia-liang (a.k.a. Lau Kar-leung) can trace his heritage to the fighting monks of the Shaolin Temple. No wonder his account of the export of Shaolin kung fu to the rest of China has an authoritative ring to it. When the hero (Gordon Liu) flees Manchu-conquered Canton for Shaolin, the monks teach him the secrets of their thirty-five chambers—they hone his physique and perfect his reflexes through elaborate yet logical exercises. By the time he achieves balletic agility, superb symmetrical strength, pinpoint peripheral vision, and the mastery of weaponry, audiences feel as if they're in fighting trim, too. The thirty-sixth chamber is, of course, the world outside the temple; the Manchus have no chance against this paragon, but seeing him put his greatness to the test provides a just and hearty payoff. Originally released in 1978. In Mandarin.—*M.S.* (Walter Reade Theatre; July 3 and July 5.)

28 DAYS LATER

Another helpful development for the British Tourist Board. Danny Boyle's horror film, alternately savage and glum, shows London—and, by implication, most of England—destroyed by a fast-acting plague. Borne in the blood, it passes from one Brit to another with a single bite; soon, the capital is empty save for marauding zombies, leaving the unchewed—such as Jim (Cillian Murphy) and Selena (Naomie Harris)—to drift around, shop without paying, and never quite have sex. Any resemblance to normal teen-age behavior is entirely coincidental. Brendan Gleeson, much the best and cheeriest thing in the movie, plays a taxi-driver who helps them to leave town; from here on, Boyle and his screenwriter, Alex Garland, run out of gas. The picture is twitchy and annoying, flecked with blood and half-digested ideas, and too much is left unexplained. As a scheme for solving central London's traffic problem, though, it is unlikely to be surpassed.—*A.L.* (6/30/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

WAIT UNTIL DARK

Directed by Terence Young and adapted by Robert and Jane-Howard Carrington from Frederick Knott's Broadway hit, this 1967 one-set suspense film has a strong opening and closing and a sagging midsection. Happily, it also has Audrey Hepburn as the heroine, a blind woman in a New York basement apartment, and Alan Arkin as the villain, who enlists Jack Weston and Richard Crenna to ferret out and remove a heroin-filled doll that they think is stashed in Hepburn's place. Hepburn summons up reedy resiliency and humor—she rises above the rigged pathos, whether she's responding to the tough-love approach to blindness adopted by her husband (Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.) or to the idiotic show the bad guys put on to win her trust. Arkin's performance is all gimmicks, mostly good ones: with bangs, sideburns, a leather jacket, and an adenoidal, "intellectual" delivery, he's an evil suburbanite in beatnik's clothing.—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; July 3-4.)

WINGED MIGRATION

The French filmmaker Jacques Perrin shows us things we have never seen before: the alien world of insects in "Microcosmos" and, now, migrating birds in all their airborne glory. Perrin and his team of camera operators employ remote-control gliders and balloons to astonishing effect—the camera literally flies alongside the birds as they wing their way north and south in their search for food. They capture some amazing solo efforts, like the common murre who plunges off a ten-story seaside cliff, as well as the beauty of numbers, as in the scene of an entire flock of white-faced whistling ducks, all turning their heads at once. The images are mostly left alone, with minimal dialogue and endurable New Age music. Bird-lovers will be in heaven, and the less ornithologically inclined will be surprised to learn that some Canada geese don't hang around golf courses all winter. Among the more memorable birds on display is the Clark's grebe, which can pull off the cool trick of walking on water.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas and 64th and 2nd.)

ALSO PLAYING

HUMAN WEAPON
Film Forum.
RESPIRO
Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.
WHALE RIDER
BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, Empire 25, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

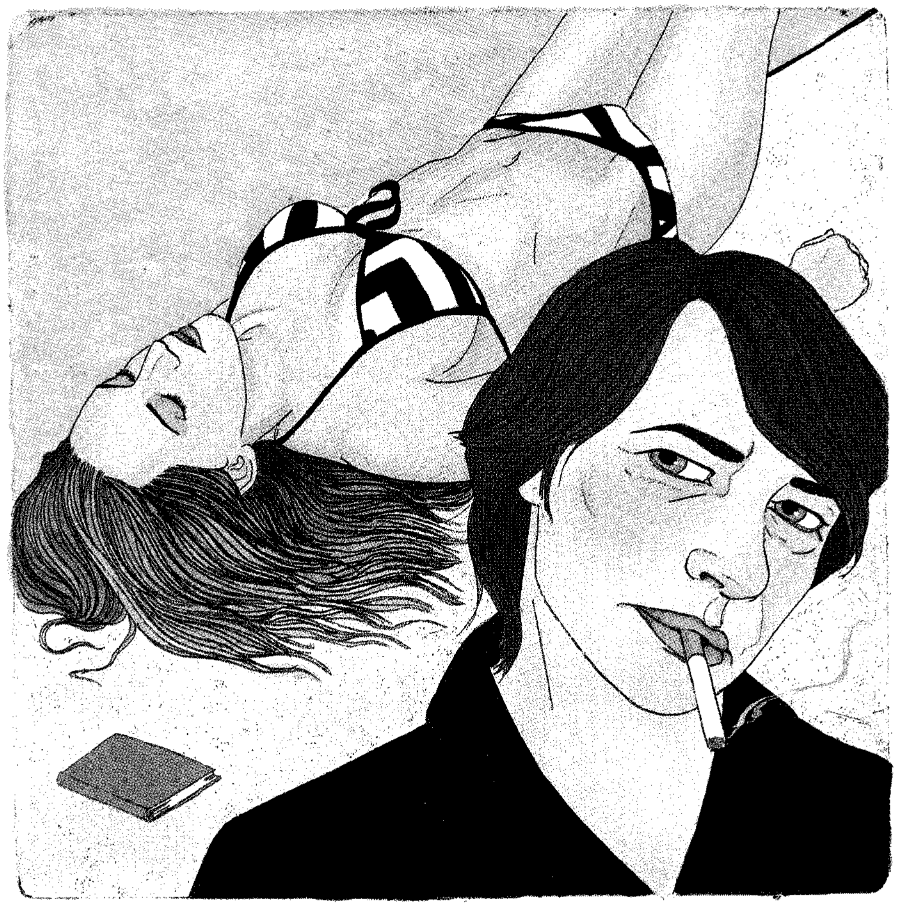
Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave.,
Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
(212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave.
at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
(212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave.
(212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd.,
Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
(212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St.
(212-334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through July 14: "Stephen Frear's England," a retrospective of the director's work. July 5 at 2: "Gumshoe" (1971). ♦ July 5-6 at 4: "My Beautiful Laundrette" (1985). ♦ July 6 at 2: "Bloody Kids" (1979). ♦ Repertory nights. July 5-6 at 6:30: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1967, Luis Buñuel; in French).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Audrey Hepburn films. July 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Charade" (1963, Stanley Donen). ♦ July 3-4 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Wait Until Dark" (†). ♦ A weekend of films produced by Troma Entertainment. July 5 at 3 and 9:20: "Sgt. Kabukiman, N.Y.P.D." (1991, Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz). ♦ July 5 at 6: "All the Love You Cannes!" (1962, Kaufman, Gabriel Friedman, and Sean McGrath). ♦ July 6 at 2 and 6:50: "The Toxic Avenger" (1985, Kaufman and Herz). ♦ July 6 at 4:30 and 9:10: "The Toxic Avenger, Part II" (1989, Kaufman and Herz). ♦ Billy Wilder films. July 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Ace in the Hole" (1951). ♦ BAMcinématek favorites. July 8 at 5 and 8: "Le Cercle Rouge" (†).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through July 3: "The Lubitsch Touch," a three-week retrospective of the German director's career. July 2 at 2, 5:30, and 9 and July 3 at 1 and 4:30: "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife" (1938). ♦ July 2 at 3:40 and 7:10 and July 3 at 2:40: "Design for Living" (1933). ♦ July 3 at 7: "Rosita" (1923). ♦ July 3 at 9: "The Marriage Circle" (1924). ♦ Through July 24: "The Freed Unit and the Golden Age of the M-G-M Musical," a tribute to Arthur Freed's classic productions. July 4-7 at 1, 3:15, 5:45, 8, and 10:15: "The Band Wagon" (1953, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ July 8 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "Cabin in the Sky" (†). ♦ July 8 at 3:30 and 7:30 "The Wizard of Oz" (1939, Victor Fleming).



Opening July 2, "Swimming Pool," directed by François Ozon.

LARA TOMLIN

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-315-6160)—The comedies of Sacha Guitry. July 8 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Le Roman d'un Tricheur" (1936; in French).
GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through July 4: "To Save and Project," restored and preserved films. July 3 at 2: "How Green Was My Valley" (1941, John Ford). ♦ July 3 at 4:30: "La Dolorosa" (1935, Jean Grémillon; in Spanish). ♦ July 3 at 6:30: "L'Atalante" (†), shown with "The Life of a River: The Seine" (1931, Jean Lods; in French) and unedited rushes from "L'Atalante." ♦ July 3 at 9 and July 4 at 3: Fragments from "Satanas" (1919, F. W. Murnau) and "The Last Laugh" (1924, Murnau). ♦ July 4 at 6:30: "One-Armed Swordsman" (1967, Zhang Che; in Mandarin). ♦ July 4 at 8:45: "The Hired Hand" (1971, Peter Fonda). ♦ Through Aug. 31: Summer repertory classics. July 5 at 1: "The Lower Depths" (†). ♦ July 5 at 3:30: "Boudu Saved from Drowning" (1932, Jean Renoir, in French) and "A Day in the Country" (1936, Renoir; in French). ♦ July 5 at 6 and July 7 at 8:15: "Grand Illusion" (1937, Renoir; in French). ♦ July 5 at 8:30 and July 7 at 6: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Renoir; in French). ♦ July 6 at 2: "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ July 6 at 4: "Croupier" (1998, Mike Hodges). ♦ July 6 at 6:30: "Juliet of the Spirits" (1965, Federico Fellini; in Italian).
SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. July 3-5: "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" (1984, Steven Spielberg).
THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through July 13: Sci-Fi Flick Fest. July 5 at 2 and July 6 at 6:45: "The Incredible Shrinking Man" (1957, Jack Arnold). ♦ July 5 at 3:30 and July 6 at 8:15: "On the Beach" (†). ♦ July 5 at 6:45 and July 6 at 2: "Alien" (1979, Ridley Scott). ♦ July 5 at 9 and July 6 at 4:15: "Supernova" (1999, Walter Hill).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through July 10: "Heroic Grace: The Chinese Martial Arts Film." All films are shown in their original language with subtitles. July 2 at 2 and 6:15: "The Six-Fingered Lord of the Lute, Part 1" (1965, Chan Lit-ban). ♦ July 2 at 4: "Come Drink with Me" (1966, King Hu). ♦ July 2 at 8:15: "Golden Swallow" (1968, Zhang Che). ♦ July 3 at 2 and 6:45 and July 5 at 5: "The 36th Chamber of Shaolin" (†). ♦ July 3 at 4:30 and 9 and July 5 at 7:15: "Return to the 36th Chamber of Shaolin" (1980, Lau Kar-leung). ♦ July 4 at 2 and July 6 at 4:15 and 8:45: "Ashes of Time" (1994, Wong Kar-wai). ♦ July 4 at 4:15 and July 6 at 2 and 6:30: "Killer Clans" (1976, Chu Yuan). ♦ July 4 at 6:30: "Dragon Inn" (1968, King). ♦ July 4 at 8:45: "Last Hurray for Chivalry" (1979, John Woo). ♦ July 5 at 1: "Escorts Over Tiger Hill" (1969, Wang Xinglei). ♦ July 5 at 3:15: "From the Highway" (1970, Zhang Zengze). ♦ July 5 at 9:30, July 7 at 3:45 and 8, and July 8 at 1 and 9: "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (2000, Ang Lee). ♦ July 7 at 2 and 6:15: "The Story of Wong Fei Hung, Part 1" (1949, Wu Pang).

Steve Galbraith, Morgan Stanley Chief Investment Officer

Fat tails thinning.

Stock return spreads go on a diet.

The market has been a relative disaster for three years now, and volatility indices remain somewhat elevated. And yet despite an environment where cats are chasing dogs, we are here to tell you that when it comes to individual stock returns, *fat tails are thinning.*

That's correct. Although we suspect it does not feel this way to most investors, the market has recently experienced a very significant liposuction operation. The wide return spreads or *fat-tailed* return distribution pattern for stocks we chronicled during the aftermath of the bubble has left the building, and there are several implications to draw from these thinning tails:

First, single-stock risk may be dissipating, suggesting fewer catastrophes ahead. Second, the opportunity set in long-short hedge portfolios has probably been winnowed massively. Third, while it seems wildly counter-intuitive given the extreme outcomes that could play out politically and economically, low returns and low volatility, not low returns and high volatility, could characterize the future.

Causes of fat tails — valuations as nutty as a fruitcake. Over the 1980 to 1996 period, the quintile of stocks with the highest price/book valuations traded within a relatively narrow range of around 4.0 multiple points above the cheapest quintile. At the height of the market frenzy, the quintile of most highly valued stocks traded at a staggering 21.1 point book multiple premium to the bottom quintile. Today, the spread between cheap and dear in the market is about 4.9 multiple points, in line with the average of the past 20-odd years.

With the advent of faceless Internet trading, individual investors could roll the dice without fear that someone might question whether margining one's portfolio up to the gills with Webvan was a prudent use of retirement dough. Well, roll folks did. Just as valuation spreads grew some 5 standard deviations above norms, so did margin debt. At its peak, margin debt reached almost 20% of total consumer credit. Since then, margin levels have returned within the realm of long-term norms.

Ga-ga growth expectations. Although it is difficult to justify the nonsense of the late '90s, there actually was an enormous increase in the spread of forecasts for long-term growth rates for the top and bottom quintile of stocks. As goofy as it seems, someone was actually forecasting that 200 companies would increase earnings almost 8 times nominal GDP (despite 100 years of history that suggest such an outcome was a virtual impossibility). Well today, we have moved from a mega-sigma event to…below average.

While it may indeed be better to burn out than to rust, a decent case is building that wide-return spreads or *fat tails* on stocks have already burned out and are now poised to rust. Although it may be too early to predict, if the biggest market boom and bust ends with a whimper while the world stage seems to be exploding with a bang, that could be the ultimate ironic ending to this manic era.

Steve Galbraith
Chief Investment Officer

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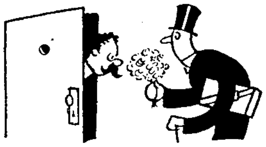
THE
NEW YORKER

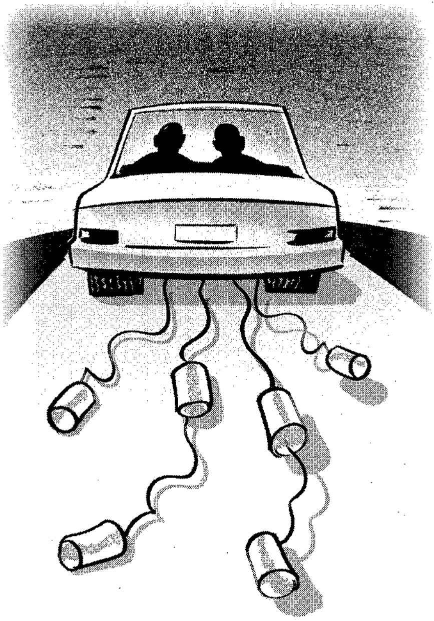
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
NORTHERN LIGHT



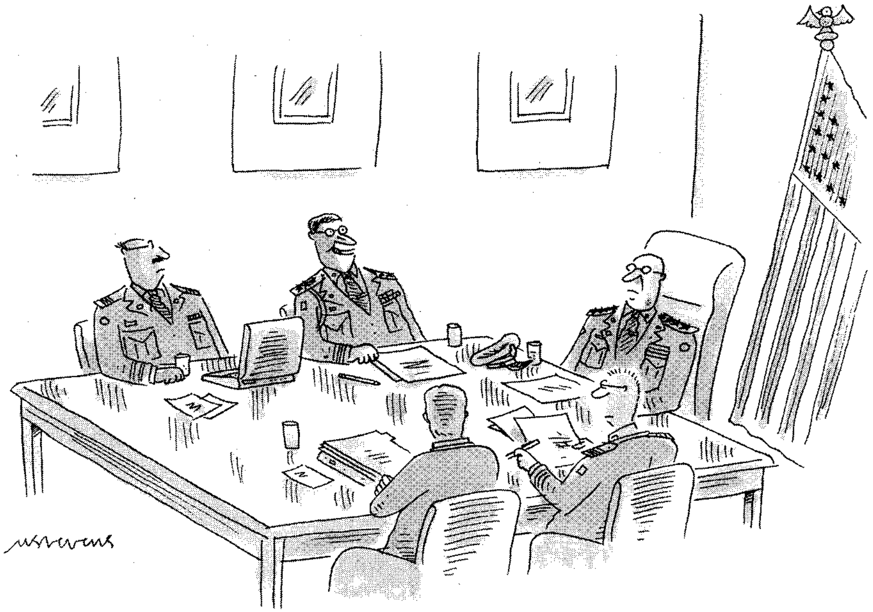
The Fourth of July is one of the best holidays around: fireworks that get better every year, no gift-giving hassles, not too much commercial exploitation, nice weather (usually), no religious test for participation. And, no doubt, throwing off the yoke of perfidious Albion is something to celebrate. Still, every now and then a small regret intrudes that we weren't able to work out a peaceful resolution of our differences with the mother country. God knows we tried ("We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble Terms," the Declaration of Independence notes sadly), but George III wouldn't listen to reason. A little less taxation, a little more representation, and, presto—two hundred and twenty-seven years later, we might all be Canadians. Would that be so terrible?

Our big, easygoing neighbor to the north has its problems—too cold, a weak dollar, a reputation for paralyzing dullness—but its people are reasonably free, and they seem, on the whole, quite nice. Their contributions to popular music (Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, The Band, the McGarrigle sisters, Leonard Cohen, Alanis Morissette—the list goes on) are legion. Their anomalous gift for comedy (Martin Short, Dan Aykroyd, Mike Myers, and Jim Carrey are among the names that spring to mind) has made Ontario the Catskills of our time. By sending their soldiers to serve side by side with ours in Afghanistan, they supported us in our hour of need—the act of a true friend. By declining to participate in our Iraq adventure, they let us know that they sincerely thought we were making a mistake—also the act of a true friend. In matters of public policy they are often more enlightened than we are, without being snooty about it. Their health-care system is a mess, but it's a fairer, more humane mess than ours is. They have mastered the knack of having guns without using them to slaughter one another. They have a comparatively sensible approach to the drug problem: while our federal government tries strenuously to put marijuana smokers in jail, even (or especially) when the marijuana has been smoked for medical purposes in states whose people have voted to sanction such use, their federal government is about to decriminalize the possession of small amounts. And now—with a minimum of fuss, hardly any hysteria, and no rending of garments—they have made it legal for persons of the same gender to marry each other.



Meanwhile, south of the border down U.S.A. way, the Supreme Court issued its long-awaited decision in the case of Lawrence v. Texas. With surprising firmness, the Court struck down the remaining laws against "sodomy," thus bringing the United States to where Canada was a generation ago. Those laws, in Texas and twelve other states, had rendered it a crime, until last Thursday, to make love in the ways that, for anatomical reasons, are gay folks' sole option. It was a strong, solid decision, six to three, with only the hard-core hard right—Antonin Scalia, joined by William Rehnquist and Clarence Thomas—dissenting. In his dissent, Justice Scalia accused his colleagues of having "signed on to the so-called homosexual agenda." And what is that so-called agenda? Daisy chains on the church steps? Compulsory drag shows at school assemblies? "Eliminating the moral opprobrium that has traditionally attached to homosexual conduct," as in Scalia's own definition? No, it's worse than that. Just like in Canada, some of these people actually want to get married.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC PALMA



"I just got a great idea for a war!"

• •

Pace Joni Mitchell, they *want* a piece of paper from the city hall, keeping them tied and true.

For the moment, the only city halls in the Western Hemisphere that are issuing such pieces of paper are in Ontario, where, on June 10th, the provincial court of appeals declared that the old common-law definition of marriage, "the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman," did not comport with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada's version of the Bill of Rights, and that, effective immediately, marriage, at least in Ontario, is "the voluntary union for life of two persons." A week later, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that, instead of trying to get the decision overturned, his cabinet would seek to codify it. Legislation is to be drafted over the next few weeks, vetted by Canada's supreme court, and submitted to the federal parliament. It's pretty much a lock that, perhaps as early as next fall, gay marriage will be the undisputed law of the land from St. John's to the Klondike.

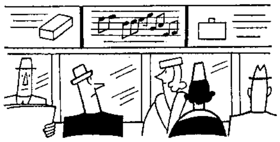
This ghastly prospect was evidently on Scalia's mind as he composed his dissent in Lawrence v. Texas. If sodomy laws are unsustainable, he warned, then so are "laws against bigamy, same-sex marriage, adult incest, prostitution, masturbation"—masturbation? is that one still on the books?—"adultery, fornication, bestiality, and obscenity." Doom looms, it would appear. According to Scalia, "The Court has taken sides in the culture war," and the next step, logically, must be "judicial imposition of homosexual marriage, as has recently occurred in Canada." Leaving aside the question of who, exactly, gay marriage would be an imposition upon, this seems prohibitively unlikely. According to the polls, most people up there think gay marriage is O.K. Most people down here don't. And the Court's majority opinion, written by Anthony Kennedy, insists that it says nothing about "whether the government must give formal recognition to any relationship that homosexual persons seek to enter."

Still, a lot has changed since 1986, when, in Bowers v. Hardwick, the Supreme Court upheld a sodomy law like the one it threw out last week. The majority's language then was dismissive: the notion of "a fundamental right to engage in homosexual sodomy," sneered the late Justice Byron White, was "at best, facetious." Last week, the majority was respectful. "The liberty protected by the Constitution allows homosexual persons the right to choose to enter upon relationships in the confines of their homes and their own private lives and still retain their dignity as free persons," Kennedy wrote. He left the sarcasm to Scalia, whose tone seems to have embarrassed even Justice Thomas. The latter filed his own odd little note, seven sentences long, explaining that he thinks the Texas law is "silly," that if he were a member of the Texas Legislature he "would vote to repeal it," and that "punishing someone for expressing his sexual preference through noncommercial consensual conduct with another adult" is deplorable. It's just that he can't do anything about it, because there's no such thing as a constitutional right to privacy.

A lot of people, including some conservatives, already think that if gays want to get married—if, in other words, they want to settle down, become pillars of the community, and bring up children in loving, stable homes—then perhaps a little encouragement is in order. But "Christian" conservatives disagree. So it'll be a while before we get gay wedlock here. Gay applicants for marriage licenses will have to join the queue at the city clerk's office in Toronto, which stayed open last Saturday and Sunday, in honor of Gay Pride Week. Good old Canada. It's the kind of country that makes you proud to be a North American.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

UNDERGROUND
THE JONATHAN ZIZMORS

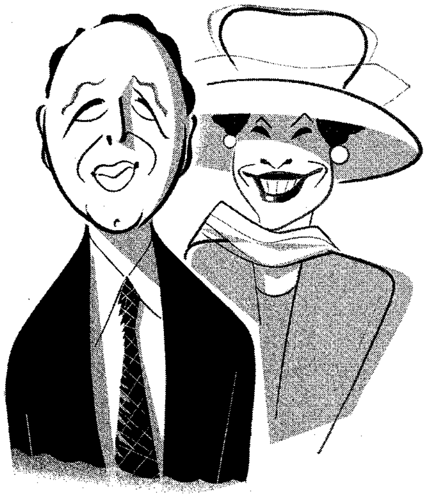


Among the innovations with which patrons of the New York City subway system have recently been faced—rising fares, the puzzling and unsatisfying introduction of the V line—perhaps the most startling are the new advertisements for the dermatological services of Dr. Jonathan Zizmor, who has been promising relief from unsightly bumps and ashy skin to subterranean travellers since the early eighties. Gone is the scary before-and-after shot; instead, the new ad, which had its début in May, features a nightscape of indeterminate skyscrapers and includes not just a photograph of the ageless Dr. Z but a picture showing a handsome woman in a big pale hat, and a slogan that reads, "Doctor and Mrs. Zizmor Salute New Yorkers for Their Strength and Courage."

Naturally, this raises two questions:

Why are we being saluted now, twenty-one months after our peak of courageousness? But, first, where has Mrs. Zizmor been hiding all our lives?

Well, Mrs. Zizmor explained over tea at the Four Seasons Hotel last week, she was being Mrs. Friedman, during her first marriage, which ended eight years ago, and before that she was being Ms. Alexandra Levin. (Dr. Z's previous marriage also ended in divorce.) "We have only been married for two years," she said, speaking from under a dramatic, wide-brimmed straw hat, which is one of about a hundred hats she owns. Mrs. Zizmor has beautiful skin and the self-possession that suggests a career on the stage, though she was, until recently, a sales and marketing consultant for technology companies. Every now and then, she took the hand of Dr. Zizmor, who sat next to her and looked on with admiration. He has a pallid complexion and russet-colored hair, and was wearing a tie printed with the subway map.



Dr. and Mrs. Zizmor

The Zizmors met when each was having dinner with friends at the Four Seasons restaurant and the proximity of their tables led to conversation. "The first thing I thought when I met him was, He's normal, and he's really, really smart," said Mrs. Zizmor, who is forty-four years old, which makes her fourteen years younger than the real Dr. Zizmor, though about the same age as his subway representation. "I'm from Chicago, so I had no idea who Dr. Zizmor was. I told a friend of mine, and she said, 'Zizmor! Jonathan Zizmor! He's a big guy!' I said, O.K., but I didn't really get it."

"She had never been on the subway," Dr. Zizmor, who speaks in a shy mumble, said.

During their first date, at Le Cirque, she mistakenly ordered two entrées instead of an appetizer and an entrée. "But he didn't say a word," she said. "He had a lot of class, and he let it go."

"And she ordered milk," Dr. Zizmor said.

"With dessert," Mrs. Zizmor said. "You have to have milk with cake."

Their third date took place on Dr. Zizmor's birthday. "I took him out to dinner, and I gave him his starter hat, his first chapeau," she recounted. "He never wears it. I said, 'What would be your ultimate birthday gift?' And he said, 'To be married by my birthday next year to you.' " Six months later, they were married in a suite at the Plaza; Mrs. Zizmor's subway photograph was taken just before the ceremony. "When we got married, we were in love, but it was nothing compared to now," Dr. Zizmor said.

"The bottom line is we enjoy each other," Mrs. Zizmor said. "It's easy. We are a little different on the outside presentation, but built very similarly."

Not long after their honeymoon—Lake Como, Zurich, and Lugano—Mrs. Zizmor persuaded the reluctant Dr. Zizmor to leave Manhattan, where he had always lived, in favor of Riverdale. "We had a huge fight, but I really love it now," he said.

"We bought the house to entertain and throw functions," Mrs. Zizmor explained. "I just threw a Guardian Angels fund-raiser in our home, for Curtis Sliwa. We want to have great thinkers, and host parties that have authors."

"Our rabbi uses the house for meetings," Dr. Zizmor said. "This is going to sound weird, but we want to use it for world peace. We are going to invite people who hate each other, and they will spend a weekend together."

So why did it take Dr. Zizmor until the late spring of 2003 to issue his salute to New Yorkers? "What happened was we thought of it after September 11th," he said. "We wanted to do something, but we never got around to doing it. New Yorkers have been through a lot—the bad economy and the violence. When you get on the subway every day, it's an act of courage."

Including Mrs. Zizmor in the ad was a way of paying tribute to the city's residents, Dr. Zizmor said, and he explained, "This is how it came out of my brain: New York is a big family, and I want to show my family." Now Mrs. Zizmor, whose name on her credit card already causes double takes, has started to be recognized in her own right. "The delicatessen guy, slicing the meat at Fine & Schapiro, said, 'I saw you,' and I said, 'Oh, really?' " she said. But her celebrity, she pointed out, is nothing compared with her husband's. "Women knock him down! With skin questions!" she said.

"People, in a way, love me," Dr. Zizmor said. "It's really amazing."

"I think they have a warm feeling," Mrs. Zizmor said. "People like things that stick around."

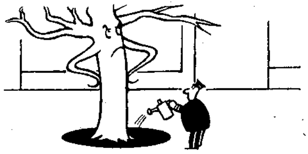
"They see my face all the time," he said.

"Your *punim*," Mrs. Zizmor said fondly.

"My *punim*," Dr. Zizmor said, with satisfaction.

—*Rebecca Mead*

FEED ME DEPT.
SOME PLANT



For fifty years, the *Agave americana* at the New York Botanical Garden's Enid A. Haupt Conservatory led an exemplary, if somewhat artificial, life. Five feet high and ten feet across, the specimen would occasionally drop one of its fleshy, gray-green leaves or send up a new shoot, known as a "pup." What, exactly, got into the agave this spring no one is quite sure, but in March the plant began to swell noticeably. The conservatory manager, Francisca Coelho, went home one Friday, and by the time she returned, on Monday, the swelling had given rise to a three-foot spike. The spike continued to grow, Jack-and-the-Beanstalk style, at a rate of nearly a foot a day, until it threatened to break through the glass above. At that point, Coelho had an opening made for it in the roof, and it kept on growing until it had reached a height of thirty feet. The tip of the spike is now covered with dark-green buds.

A native of Trinidad, Coelho is slim, with dark, shoulder-length hair and a slightly distracted manner. Standing in the conservatory's American-desert wing the other day, she noticed two tiny weeds sprouting from a crack in the pathway. A very important donor was scheduled to stop by any minute, and Coelho told a gardener who was sweeping up to make sure that the sign in front of the agave was polished before he arrived.

Agaves, Coelho explained, are monocarpic, which means that "once they bloom, they die." How long this takes varies from species to species; in the wild, the *Agave americana*, a native of northeastern Mexico, flowers after anywhere from ten to thirty years, and expires in a shower of bright-yellow blossoms. Though the buds were still closed, the conservatory's specimen was already clearly in decline, its base riddled with wrinkles, like the skin of an elephant. Coelho fingered one of the plant's giant leaves, edged with little shark-tooth-shaped spikes, and pronounced it "flaccid."

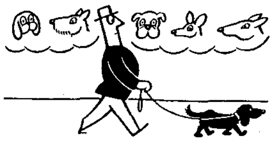
The connection between sex and death lends a certain poignancy to the *Agave americana's* exertions, which might otherwise have an embarrassingly explicit quality. Here is a plant, well beyond its middle years, staking it all on one last fling, like Professor Immanuel Rath in "The Blue Angel." But if Coelho was moved by this spectacle of horticultural *Liebestod* she didn't let on. "It's great for everybody to see it bloom," she said. "But for me it's not good. I'm going to have a big hole here." In order to remove the remains of the *Agave americana*, she pointed out, she will have to dig up all the plants around it as well.

Nobody knows just when the agave will bloom, although presumably that will happen sometime in the next few weeks, nor precisely when it will drop dead. Coelho is still debating whether to replace it with another specimen of the same species. "I don't know if I want it to do this again," she observed. "Of course, I would not be around to see it."

Eventually, a golf cart pulled up, carrying the very important and, as it turned out, also very ancient donor. He was attached to an oxygen tank, and, in order for him to see the agave, the cart had to be driven all the way inside the conservatory. Coelho, smiling, did her best to be charming; whether the donor was inspired by what he saw, or horrified, was hard to say. Coelho then retreated to her office, which is hidden behind a showcase of carnivorous plants, and went back to work.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

RANKINGS
LEADING THE BLIND



New York was named one of the top four cities to live in by the American Foundation for the Blind the other day, and, in honor of the official bestowal of an A.F.B. Livable Community Award, there was a re-creation of the very first time a guide dog led a blind man across a street, in New York City seventy-five years ago. Livability-wise, New York ranked just behind Charlotte, Berkeley, and Kalamazoo, but it beat out La Crosse, Wisconsin, which is more impressive than it sounds: even though most non-blind New Yorkers can't imagine living anywhere else, they tend not to think of New York as being livable, exactly.

On a recent sunny morning, Jywanza Maye and RoseMarie McCaffery, co-workers at the Associated Blind, on William Street, were on their way to the livability-award ceremony, at the corner of West and Chambers Streets. They were in full agreement that New York deserved its high ranking, though they disagreed on how to get over there. RoseMarie favored the M22 bus.

"Why don't we take the subway?" Jywanza asked.

"I don't do subways," RoseMarie said.

Jywanza, who is in his twenties and was dressed in jeans and a cool leather cap, extolled New York's livability as his guide dog, Bentley, lunged at the end of his leash. "I've even been to Charlotte, and I think New York's the best city to get around," Jywanza said. "I mean, first, the subways are 24/7, so I don't have to say at midnight, 'Oh, I'm blind. I gotta get a cab.' "

On the M22, RoseMarie, who is in her fifties and was dressed in a dark business suit (her guide dog's name is Iliad), talked about the first American guide dog crossing West Street—its nickname was Death Street at the time—from the piers, in 1928. Newspaper reporters had dared a nineteen-year-old named Morris Frank, who had gone to Switzerland to get a guide dog—there were none in the United States at the time—to step into the traffic. Frank recounted the scene in his autobiography, "First Lady of the Seeing Eye" (one in a long line of such memoirs, among them Hector Chevigny's "My Eyes Have a Cold Nose"). "You should read Frank's book," RoseMarie said. "I've heard it about a dozen times, and I cry every time."

The bus driver shouted, "West Street!" RoseMarie and Jywanza got off and walked across Chambers, to the corner where the ceremony was just starting up. Carl R. Augusto, the A.F.B. president, stood and enumerated New York's livability attributes: neighborhood feel, grid-like layout, sidewalks everywhere, take-out everything, and a widespread reliance on public transportation. "We even have the only blind theatre company in the U.S.," Augusto said. "We also feel that the people in New York are helpful and respectful. Of course, there are people in this country who think that New Yorkers aren't respectful and helpful, but we know different."

Then the audience's attention was directed to Michael Moran, a representative of The Seeing Eye, an organization that trains guide dogs, who was standing approximately ten traffic lanes away, across West Street, with his guide dog, Kurt—they were poised to re-create the Morris Frank crossing. It was a corny idea that ended up being very dramatic; people applauded when they saw or heard that Moran had made it. "The light changed at just the right moment!" Alexander Wood, the executive director of Disabilities Network of NYC, shouted from his wheelchair.

Kurt led Moran up to the podium just in front of Bentley, who was still lunging occasionally, while Iliad sat peacefully among a small pack of guide dogs. ("Bentley," Jywanza said. "I'm gonna . . .") Moran sorted out his speech, which was in Braille. "People often ask me if my dog has ever done anything heroic," Moran said. "And I say, 'Yes. Every day. Since he does it so well, I just don't know about most of it.' "

The ceremony was over by noon. Guide dogs set off in various directions, and RoseMarie and Jywanza headed back to work.

"Here's the bus stop," RoseMarie said.

"No, no, no!" Jywanza said. "Why not take the subway back?"

"Go your own way, youngblood," RoseMarie said.

—*Robert Sullivan*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
WHAT AILS US

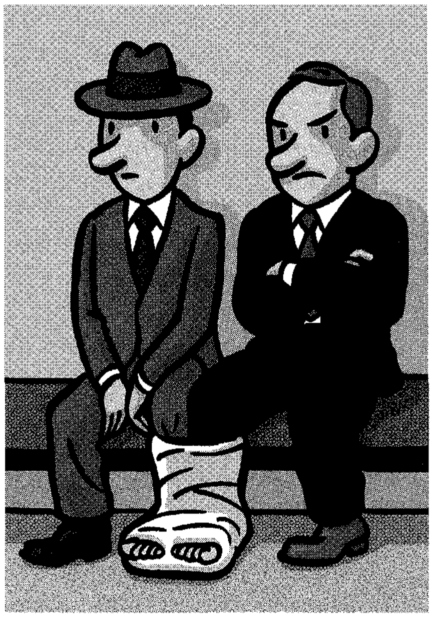
Forgive American consumers if they feel a bit perplexed. Policymakers and pundits have been warning them about the prospect of deflation (a prolonged and widespread decline in prices), but there's no sign of any decline in many of the prices that people pay every day. Car-insurance premiums jumped more than nine per cent last year. Health-insurance costs are soaring, to say nothing of the cost of a haircut. Cable-TV prices have risen sixteen per cent since 2000. And then there's college: tuitions at private colleges have jumped 5.6 per cent annually over the past three years, according to the College Board, and public colleges are even worse. In times like these, it's hard to get worked up about deflation.

Why the divergence? It may have something to do with Mozart. When Mozart composed his String Quintet in G Minor (K. 516), in 1787, you needed five people to perform it—two violinists, two violists, and a cellist. Today, you still need five people, and, unless they play really fast, they take about as long to perform it as musicians did two centuries ago. So much for progress.

An economist would say that the productivity of classical musicians has not improved over time, and in this regard the musicians aren't alone. In a number of industries, workers produce about as much per hour as they did a decade or two ago. The average college professor can't grade papers or give lectures any faster today than he did in the early nineties. It takes a waiter just as long to serve a meal, and a car-repair guy just as long to fix a radiator hose.

The rest of the American economy functions differently. In most businesses, workers are continually getting more productive and can produce a lot more per hour than they could ten or twenty years ago. In 1979, workers at G.M. needed forty-one hours to assemble a car. Today, they need just twenty-four. In the nineties, according to the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, retailers boosted their sales per hour by sixty per cent, and that was nothing compared with computer makers, whose productivity since 1995 has gone up sixty per cent each year. Because companies are producing more for less, they can hold down costs, and when times are good they can raise wages without hiking prices. So, in the late nineties, as productivity rose, wages did, too, though inflation lay dormant.

Generally, productivity growth is a boon, but it creates problems for nonproductive enterprises like classical music, education, and car repair: to keep luring talent, they have to increase wages, or else people eventually migrate to businesses that pay better. Instead of becoming nurses or mechanics, they become telecom engineers or machinists. That's why teachers are getting paid a lot more than they were twenty years ago. (The average salary for an associate college professor has risen almost seventy per cent since the early eighties, and that's if you adjust for inflation.) To pay those wages, schools and hospitals have to raise prices. The result is that in industries where productivity is flat costs and prices keep going up. Economists call this phenomenon "Baumol's cost disease," after William Baumol, the N.Y.U. economist who first made the diagnosis, using the Mozart analogy, in the sixties. As anyone with kids knows, cost disease is alive and well. A recent study by the economists Jack Triplett and Barry Bosworth demonstrates that among the service businesses that have been least productive in recent years you'll find education, insurance, health care, and entertainment. These are the ones that have seen steep price hikes.



There are really two American economies: one that's getting more productive and one that's not. In the first—the economy of Dell, Toyota, and Wal-Mart—consumers have grown accustomed to paying less for more. In the second—the economy of Harvard, the Yankees, and Bob's Body Shop—they pay more for the same. The first economy has policymakers worried about deflation. The second has consumers worried about paying their bills.

Cost disease isn't anyone's fault. (That's why it's called a disease.) It's just endemic to businesses that are labor-intensive. Colleges, for example, could do many things more efficiently, but, since their biggest expense is labor, the only way to reduce costs is either to increase the number of students each professor teaches or to outsource the work to poorly paid adjuncts. The same goes for health care: you can control drug costs and limit expensive new procedures, but, when it comes to, say, hospital care and doctor visits, the only way to improve productivity is to shrink the size of the staff and have doctors spend less time with patients (or treat several patients at once). Thus the Hobson's choice: to lower prices you have to lower quality.

Once upon a time, economists worried that cost disease would wreck the economy, as services started to eat up more and more of people's budgets. But the evidence now suggests that it can be contained. As long as the productive industries keep growing quickly enough to offset the sluggards, the economy as a whole can stay in good shape. The most significant consequence of Baumol's cost disease, in fact, may be political, rather than economic. Some of the most important services that the government provides—education, law enforcement, health care—are the hardest to make more productive. To keep providing the same quality of services, then, government has to get more expensive. People pay more in taxes and don't get more in return, which makes it look as though the public sector, at least compared with the private sector, is inept and bloated. But it could be that the government is merely stuck in inherently low-productivity-growth businesses. It's not inefficient. It's just got a bad case of Baumol's.

—*James Surowiecki*

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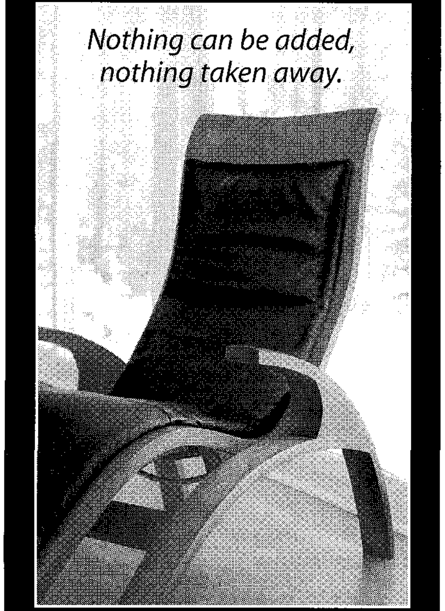

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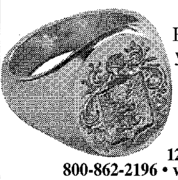

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LETTER FROM CHINA

UNDERWATER

The world's biggest dam floods the past.

BY PETER HESSLER

JUNE 7, 2003

At six-thirteen in the evening, after the Zhou family has already moved their television, a desk, two tables, and five chairs onto a pumpkin patch beside the road, I prop a brick upright at the river's edge. On new maps for the city of Wushan, this body of water is called Emerald Drop Lake. But the maps were printed before the lake appeared. In fact, the water is a murky brown, and the lake is actually an inlet of the Yangtze River, which for the past week has been rising behind the Three Gorges Dam. On Zhou Ji'en's next trip down from his family's bamboo-frame shack, he carries a wooden cupboard on his back. A small man, he has a pretty wife and two young daughters, and until recently they were residents of Longmen Village. The village does not appear on the new maps. A friend of Zhou's carries the next load, which includes the family's battery-powered clock. The clock, like my wristwatch, reads nearly six-thirty-five. The water has climbed two inches up the brick.

Watching the river rise is like tracking the progress of the clock's short hand: it's all but imperceptible. There is no visible current, no sound of rushing water—but at the end of every hour another half foot has been gained. The movement seems to come from within, and to some degree it is mysterious to every living thing on the shrinking banks. Beetles, ants, and centipedes radiate out in swarms from the river's edge. After the water has surrounded the brick, a cluster of insects crawl madly onto the dry tip, trying desperately to escape as their tiny island is consumed. The people knew that the flood was coming, but they did not know that it would come so fast. Most residents of Longmen left last year, when the government relocated them to Guangdong Province, in the south of China. But a few, like Zhou Ji'en and his family, stayed behind to work the land for one final spring. Lately, things have been happening very fast. Two days ago, the elder daughter, Zhou Shurong, completed first grade. Yesterday, her mother, Ou Yunzhen, harvested the last of their water spinach; today, those plots are underwater. All that remain are pumpkins, eggplants, and red peppers.

More than thirty feet above Zhou's pumpkin patch, a neighbor named Huang Zongming is building a fishing boat. Huang has told me that it will be "two or three more days" before the river reaches the boat. Chinese peasants tend to speak about time in an indeterminate manner, even at a moment like this, when the river is a very determined two and a half days ahead of schedule; the government says that it will ultimately rise by more than two hundred feet.

The Zhou family has rented a three-room apartment on the hillside above, and they are moving today because several inches of water have crept across the only road out. At 7:08 P.M., the brick is half submerged. Zhou Shurong has carried out her possessions—an umbrella, an inflated inner tube, and a Mashimaro backpack that contains a pencil box and schoolbooks. As the adults continue hauling furniture, the little girl sits at a table in the pumpkin patch and calmly copies a lesson:

The spring rain falls softly,
Everybody comes to look at the peach
blossoms.

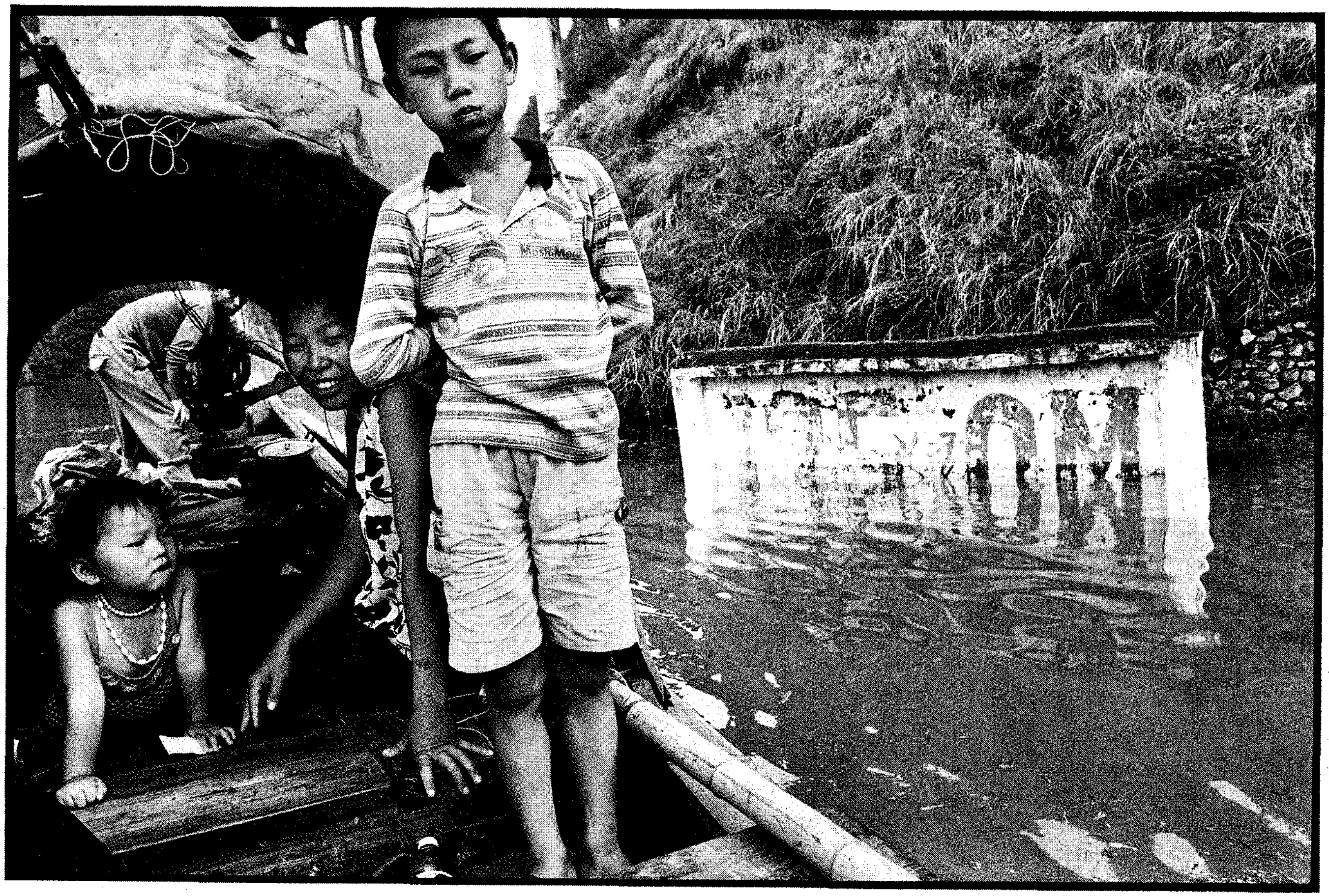
At seven-twenty, a young man arrives on a motorcycle and catches black scorpions that are fleeing the rising water. "Usually they're hard to find," he tells me. "They're poisonous, but they can be used for medicine. In Henan Province, I've seen them sold for a hundred yuan"—twelve dollars—"a pound."

By seven-fifty-five, when a flatbed

truck appears with two moving men, the brick has vanished. Only a small stretch of road remains dry, and that is where they park the truck. The river hits the vehicle's left front tire at 8:07 P.M. The men start to load the furniture; the sky grows dark. "Hurry up!" Ou Yunzhen says. Nearby, Zhou Shurong and her five-year-old sister, Zhou Yu, stand the way children do when they sense anxiety in adults: perfectly still, arms straight at their sides, eyes unblinking. At eight-twenty-three, the water reaches the left rear tire. The television is the last object to be loaded; it is placed with care in the front seat, next to the girls. At eight-thirty-four, the driver turns the ignition. As the truck rumbles off, the water reaches the top of the hubcaps. Ou Yunzhen stays behind to harvest the last of the pepper crop in the dark.

The next day, in the hard light of the afternoon, I visit the remains of the shack to see what the family abandoned to Emerald Drop Lake: a man's left boot, half a broken Ping-Pong paddle, an empty box that says, in English, "Ladies Socks," a math examination paper, written in a young girl's hand, with the score at the top in bright-red ink—sixty-two per cent.

From 1996 to 1998, I taught English to college students in Fuling, a small city on the Yangtze some two hundred miles upstream from Wushan. Every winter, along with the other seasonal changes, the river shrank. Rain became less frequent, and the snowmelt stopped coming off the western mountains, until eventually the Yangtze exposed a strip of sandstone known as the White Crane Ridge. The ridge was thin and white and covered with thousands of inscriptions. For centuries, local officials had used it to keep track of low water levels. When I visited the ridge in January of 1998, the river was exactly two inches lower than it had been at the time of the earliest dated carving, 763 A.D. The inscriptions made it clear that, in these parts, the Yangtze's own cycle mattered more than the schedules of any authority. One carving, completed in 1086 A.D., commemorated the ridge's emergence during the ninth year of the reign of Yuanfeng, an emperor of the northern Song dynasty. In fact, Yuanfeng had died the year before, but news of the death—and of the new emperor—had yet to reach the river.



The Huangs float past a hundred-and-twenty-five-metre marker that was submerged a day later. Photograph by Mark Leong.

Fuling was still remote when I lived there. The city had no traffic lights and no highway. There was one escalator in town, and people concentrated hard before stepping onto it. The only fast-food restaurant bore the mysterious name California Beef Noodle King U.S.A. It was a poor region, and it got poorer as you went downstream toward Wushan, which was at the center of the Three Gorges—a hundred-and-twenty-mile stretch of narrow mountains and cliffs through which the Yangtze passes, creating a landscape of stunning beauty, hard farming, and fast currents.

I could see the river from the classroom where I taught writing. Our government-provided textbook included a model essay, in the chapter "Argumentation," entitled "The Three Gorges Project Is Beneficial." The essay cited a few drawbacks—flooded cultural relics, displaced populations—but the author went on to assert that these were easily outweighed by the benefits of better flood control, a greater supply of electricity, and improved river transportation. Given the fact that the Chinese government had strictly limited public criticism of the dam, we could go only so far with the "Argumentation" unit. I spent more time teaching the proper form of an American business letter.

The idea of building a dam in the Three Gorges was conceived by Sun Yat-sen in 1919. After Sun's death, in 1925, the vision was kept alive by dictators and revolutionaries, occupiers and developers, all of whom saw the project as an important step in modernizing the nation. Chiang Kai-shek promoted the idea, as did Mao Zedong. When the Japanese occupied parts of the river valley in 1940, their engineers performed surveys; when the Kuomintang regained control of China, officials from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation helped the Chinese continue the planning. After the Kuomintang was defeated, the Communists turned to the Soviet Union for technical assistance. But the Russian advisers left after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, and during the political chaos of the next two decades the project was put on hold. (The dam's history is explored in a recently published book, "Before the Deluge," by Deirdre Chetham.)

By the time construction finally began, in 1994, the era of big dams had passed in most parts of the world. Both the United States government and the World Bank refused to support the project, because of environmental concerns. Many critics of the dam believed that one of its main goals—protection against the floods that periodically ravage central China—would be better served by the construction of a series of smaller dams on the Yangtze's tributaries. Engineers worried that the Yangtze's heavy silt might back up behind the Three Gorges Dam, limiting efficiency. Social costs were high: an estimated 1.2 million people would have to be resettled, and low-lying cities and towns would have to be rebuilt on higher ground. Once completed, the dam would be the largest in the world—as high as a sixty-story building and as wide as five Hoover Dams. The official price tag was more than twenty-one billion dollars, roughly half of which would be funded by a tax on electricity across China.

But in Fuling I never heard any of this. When I left the city, in the summer of 1998, the only visible indications of the project were a few altitude markers that had been painted onto buildings in the lower sections of town. The signs said, in bright-red paint, "177 M"—supposedly, the future height of the reservoir. It was precisely forty metres higher than the White Crane Ridge's inscription from 1086 A.D.

During the next five years, I often returned to the Three Gorges; more red signs had cropped up along the river. Most identified metre marks of either 135 or 175, because the reservoir was scheduled to be filled in two stages, first in 2003, and then at the higher level in 2009. Some of the red signs had an odd specificity: 141.9, 143.2, 146.7. They reminded me of the ridge—the whole valley was being marked and inscribed in preparation for the flood.

Down near the riverbanks, the old cities and villages were left virtually unimproved. Even though the rest of China was in a construction frenzy, there was no point in building anything new where the water was certain to rise. These settlements gave a rare glimpse into the past: untouched landscapes of gray brick and dark tile. Higher up, on the surrounding hillsides, new cities and towns were being built with cement and white tile. From the river, the Yangtze's evolving history could be read at a glance, in a series of horizontal bands: the dark riverside settlements that belonged to the past, the green stretch of farmland that would be claimed by the reservoir, and the clusters of white looking toward the future.

The new cities went through distinct stages of creation. In the beginning, the inhabitants were mostly young men: construction workers, bulldozer operators. Shops soon appeared, but they stocked almost nothing that you could eat or wear. They sold tools, windows, lighting fixtures. Once, in the new city of Fengdu, I walked down a half-built street where virtually everybody was selling doors. Women generally appeared once the local market economy took hold. After that, children materialized, and then the city was alive.

The old settlements died quickly when the government began demolishing them in 2002. Most residents were given housing compensation, which they could use to purchase apartments in the new cities. But an estimated hundred thousand rural villagers were relocated to other parts of China. Generally, they were moved in blocs: sometimes an entire hamlet was loaded onto a boat and sent downstream to another province, where the government provided small land allowances. I knew a cop who escorted an entire village by train to the southern province of Guangdong. After the old villages had been reduced to rubble, many of the residents who remained were elderly. They delayed the final move, living in tents and lean-tos. Makeshift shops sold mostly products that people could eat or wear.

A few younger people stayed behind to earn a bare living. Scavengers sold scrap metal, and peasants tried to coax one final crop out of the doomed soil. Neat rows of vegetables were cultivated amid the rubble, like gardens in a war zone. I arrived in the village of Dachang last year just as the first row of houses was being torn down. A middle-aged man sat in the wooden frame of his ruined home. It wasn't yet eleven o'clock in the morning, but he was quite drunk. "I'm like a man hanging from a nail," he told me.

Some of the stragglers were like that—they had slipped outside the valley's evolution. Often, they didn't belong to traditional Communist work units, or they were migrants who weren't eligible for compensation. When I visited the old city of Wushan in September of 2002, after most of the structures had been torn down, there were still a number of beauty parlors where prostitutes waited patiently behind blue-tinted windows. I had a sudden vision of the women, nine months later, sitting with the water up to their necks. In the tiny village of Daxi, one old man pulled out form after form, showing me how he had lost his resettlement funds—more than ten thousand yuan (around twelve thousand dollars)—on a bad investment in coal. The region was rich in doomed cultural artifacts: ancient villages that would disappear, temple sites that would be drowned. In Dachang, which had the most intact Ming- and Qing-dynasty architecture, I was shown around by a man in his early twenties named Huang Jun. At the old dock, underneath a massive banyan tree, he pointed out two stone lions that guarded the steps leading down to the water. The lions' faces were chipped and scarred; their backs had been worn smooth from decades of being sat on. In the future, the site would be underwater.

"During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards threw the lions into the river," Huang said. "It was chaotic, and nobody knew what had happened to the statues. But years later an old man dreamed one night that they were out in the water. He told the other villagers, and they searched in the river and found them. That was in 1982—I remember it. The story is very strange, but it's true."

JUNE 8TH

At nine-forty in the morning, the river is almost empty. Tourist ships have been cancelled for weeks—first because of the outbreak of SARS, and more recently because the reservoir has been filling up. The water rises at roughly six inches an hour. Some friends and I are in a small speedboat, powered by an outboard motor, and we head in the direction that used to be downstream. But now the river has no heart; it lies slack between the walls of the Wu Gorge. The water comes to life only in the bends, where the sky opens and the wind kicks up waves.

Eight months ago, I hiked this route on a series of century-old footpaths. The trails had been carved directly into the limestone cliffs, and they hung more than two hundred feet above the water. I travelled with a friend, camping along the way, and in the middle of the gorge we followed a tributary called the Shennu Stream. The Shennu came from the southern mountains and it was too shallow for boat traffic. The valley rose around us as we hiked upstream, until at last we were in a deep canyon, hopping from boulder to boulder. Ferns covered the cliffs; there weren't any red metre markings in this unpopulated place. We tried to guess how high up the cliffs the water of the new reservoir would rise.

This morning, the pilot heads to the Shennu. We move east through the Wu Gorge, where virtually all of the cliff trail is underwater. The mouth of the Shennu is wide and still; tree branches float near the banks. But upstream, where the water is flowing, the debris begins to disappear, and the river's color starts to shift. The water turns dark green, then green-blue. Long-stemmed ferns trail directly into the river—the current hasn't yet pulled them off the cliffs. We zip around one sharp bend, then another. The landscape still has the character of a water route carved by a smaller stream—it meanders wildly, taking abrupt turns—and it is mesmerizing to flash through it on a speedboat. The boat doesn't belong here; the water doesn't belong here: this is a brand-new gorge. The stream color shifts to deep blue. The sound of rapids ahead joins the motor's roar.

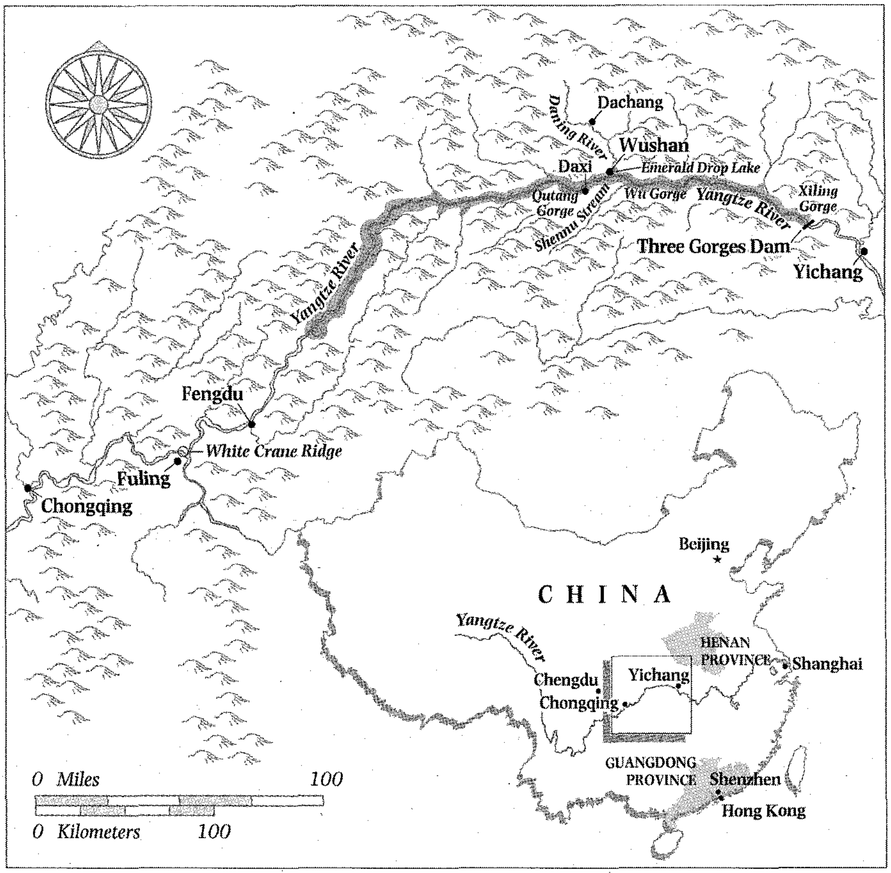
There is a horrible scraping sound and the boat lurches to a stop; everybody grabs the side. The engine cuts off. We sit in stunned silence for a moment while the pilot checks for damage. The boat and the motor are intact. Drifting backward, the rapids suddenly loud now, we see the boulder, its tip glistening beneath a foot and a half of water. Looking at the submerged shape—enormous, tan-colored, the hard curve of its back disappearing into deeper water—I think of the stone lions and the old man's dream.

At two-fifty in the afternoon, I return to Emerald Drop Lake. Yesterday, I walked on the road; today I have to take a boat. I visit the Zhous' former residence with Huang Po, the nine-year-old boy from the fishing family next door. When Huang sees the sixty-two-percent math examination lying in the rubble, he folds the paper carefully and puts it into his pocket.

"Why do you want that?" I ask.

"If I see her, I'll give it to her," Huang Po says.

"I don't think she wants it," I say.



More than a million people will be relocated, and whole cities and towns rebuilt.

JEFF WARD

The boy grins slyly and touches his pocket.

His father, Huang Zongming, has finished building the fishing boat a day earlier than he predicted. It is forty-two feet long, made of the wood of the Chinese toon tree. Eventually, Huang plans to sell it. The labor required several family members and more than twenty days of work; recently they caulked the cracks with a mixture of lime, hemp, and tung oil. This morning, they treated the entire surface with a coat of the oil. Tung oil is a natural sealant, as well as an effective paint thinner—in the late nineteen-thirties, it was China's single most valuable trade product. The tung oil gives the wood a reddish shine; the shape has a rough, simple beauty. The boat sits on wooden struts. It has never touched water. I ask Huang when he plans to move it.

"Whenever the water reaches it," he says. Huang is shirtless, a skinny, square-jawed man with efficient ropelike muscles. Later, when I ask if he's worried about the boat's not being tested before the water rises, he gives me the slightly annoyed look of a shipwright hassled by diluvian reporters. Huang Zongming is a righteous man, and he knows that his boat will float.

I first met the Huang family in September of last year, when Longmen Village was still on the map. By local standards, the place was relatively prosperous; residents fished the waters of the Daning River, the tributary that entered the Yangtze at Wushan, and farmed the rich floodland. When most of the villagers were relocated to Guangdong, Huang Zongming and his brothers, Huang Zongguo and Huang Zongde, stayed behind. The government had organized the Longmen transfer, but it was unable to insure that everybody actually went. In today's China, despite official registrations, people who are determined to live in a place can generally find a way to do so.

Huang Zongguo told me in September that the relocated peasants often complained about the scarcity of farmland in Guangdong. He added that they struggled because they couldn't understand Cantonese. Huang was disappointed with his family's resettlement allowance—roughly ten thousand yuan per person. We spoke in his simple gray brick home; the water and the electricity had just been cut off. In two weeks, Huang Zongguo said, the demolition crews would arrive.

Since last fall, Zongguo and Zongming have paid for the construction of a two-story building high above Emerald Drop Lake. The home is almost completed, but Zongming tells me that he doesn't want to move there until later in the year; during the summer he prefers to be close to the river. He lives in a shack topped by an old fibreglass boat cover, along with his wife, Chen Cihuang, and their two children, Huang Po and Huang Dan, a twelve-year-old girl. Zongming is thirty-five years old, and he has worked a fishing boat since he was ten. Unlike his former neighbors the Zhous, who grew up in the highlands and migrated to Longmen to farm, Zongming is completely at ease around water. His response to the rising river is simply to move the makeshift home thirty feet higher up the hillside. But he feels no need to undertake this project until the last possible moment. At five-fifteen in the afternoon, the water is about eight feet below the Huang home. I ask Zongming when he expects the river to reach his new boat. "Probably about noon tomorrow," he says.

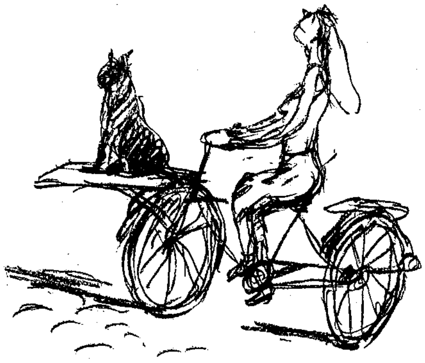
In the new city of Wushan, which has been constructed on the hillside directly above the former site, there are parallel streets called Smooth Lake Road and Guangdong Road. Smooth Lake refers to a poem that Mao Zedong wrote in 1956, when he swam across the Yangtze and dreamed of a new dam:

> Walls of stone will stand upstream to the west
> To hold back Wushan's clouds and rain
> Till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges.

The poem is familiar to people along the river, and it's not unusual for them to speak of the project in terms of national achievement and welfare. In 1997, when the Yangtze was diverted at the dam site to prepare for construction, President Jiang Zemin proclaimed, "It vividly proves once again that socialism is superior in organizing people to do big jobs." Once, in the new village of Qingshi, I saw a restaurant whose owner had posted a handwritten sign in the form of a traditional Chinese New Year's couplet:

> Honorable migrants leaving the old home and moving to a new life
> Giving up the small home, serving the nation, building a new home.

Guangdong Road takes its name from the southern province that was the first part of China to boom after free-market reforms were implemented, in 1979. Funding from this area has supported part of the Three Gorges Dam development, and in the new towns it's not unusual to see names that pay respect to the south. The new city of Wushan has a school called the Shenzhen Bao'an Hope Middle School. Shenzhen is a thriving Special Economic Zone that borders Hong Kong, and seeing its name on a school in Wushan is like coming upon Silicon Valley Inspiration High in the middle of Appalachia. New Wushan itself seems like a vision of prosperity that has arrived from far away. The town's central square features an enormous television screen, before which crowds gather at night to watch martial-arts films. Guangdong Road is lined with plastic palm trees that are illuminated after dark. There is a coffee shop called Starbucks (with no official link to the American chain). Other shops bear English names: Well-Off Restaurant, Gold Haircut, Current Bathroom. There is a clothing boutique called Sanity.



In the new cities I rarely heard criticism of the dam. Even in rural areas, where people have received far fewer benefits, complaints tend to be mild and personal. Generally, people felt that they hadn't received their full resettlement allowances, often because of the corruption of local Communist Party cadres. But those who complained almost never questioned the basic idea of the dam. When I asked Huang Zongming what he hoped his children would do when they became adults, he said he didn't care, as long as they used their education and didn't fish. He told me that the dam was "good," because it would bring more electricity to the nation. In Wushan, I met a cabdriver who told me that his home town had leapfrogged a half century. "If it weren't for the dam, it would take another fifty years for us to reach this stage," he said.

But later in the same conversation he told me that the city wouldn't last another half century, because of landslides. The new Wushan, which has a densely concentrated population of fifty thousand, is a vertical city: high buildings on steep hillsides that have never been heavily settled. Concrete erosion controls prop up many of the neighborhoods. The cabbie drove me to Jintan Road, where there had been a recent landslide.

An apartment building had been evacuated; piles of dirt still pressed against the street. I asked the cabbie if he was concerned about the fifty-year limit. "Why worry about it?" he said. "I'll be eighty by then."

During my years along the Yangtze, I had always been impressed by the resourcefulness of the people, who responded quickly to any change in their surroundings. They took the revolution of the market economy in stride; if a product became available and was in demand, shops immediately stocked it. But there was almost no long-term planning. When people spoke of the future, they meant tomorrow.

One afternoon last year, I discussed this shortsightedness with Jiang Hong, a Chinese-born geographer who teaches at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She has studied communities in the deserts of northern China where generations of government policies have been implemented to convert the region into arable land. Many of these practices were environmentally unsound, and local residents generally resisted them. But she had noticed that in recent years there has been less opposition to such schemes, partly because free-market reforms gave people more incentive to try to change their environment. In the past, government campaigns often touted abstract goals, like the attempt to surpass the United States and Britain in steel production in the late nineteen-fifties. Such a target can inspire a peasant for only so long; nowadays everybody wants a better television set. And the lack of political stability has kept people from developing long-term expectations.

"Since 1949, policy has changed so often," Jiang Hong told me. "You never knew what would happen. In the nineteen-eighties, people saw the reforms as an opportunity. And you had to seize the opportunity, because it might not last."

Whenever I travelled along the Yangtze, I sensed that the dam's timing was perfect, because the parallel drives of Communism and capitalism had bent just enough to intersect. Building the world's biggest dam appealed to the dreams of the Communist leaders, but they never could have achieved it in the days of isolation and chaos, before the market reforms. And if the reforms had been around long enough for locals to get their bearings and look beyond satisfying today's immediate desires, they would have questioned and possibly resisted the project. In the future, when people look back at China's transition period, one of the lasting monuments may well be an enormous expanse of dead water in central China.

JUNE 9TH

At nine-thirty in the morning, after Huang Zongming has drunk a single glass of grain alcohol, the waters of Emerald Drop Lake reach a corner of the wooden frame that is propping up the fishing boat. Most of the family's belongings have yet to be carried up the hill. Offshore, a snake glides through the reservoir, its head up like a periscope.

A resident of Wushan has commissioned Huang and his nephew to caulk a long rowboat, and Chen Cihuang has been left to organize the evacuation. At nine-forty-six, the water touches another corner of the boat frame. The family has loaded the craft with a few possessions: a power drill, a basket of fishing gear, a carton of Magnificent Sound cigarettes. They throw spare lumber into the stern. An inch of water has flooded the former home; Chen, her sister-in-law, and the children wade through as they carry their possessions. Huang Po splashes his sister whenever possible.

By ten-forty-seven, Huang Po has made enough of a nuisance of himself to be excused from moving duties. He strips off his clothes and goes swimming.

At ten-fifty-nine, a sampan floats past and the pilot shouts out, "Do you have a boat to sell?"

Chen snaps back, "We're this busy and you think we're selling boats?"

By eleven-forty, all four corners of the frame are underwater. Sixteen minutes later, another sampan drifts past; somebody is selling coal. The move is complete when Huang Zongguo helps the women dismantle the roof. Huang Po suns himself, stark naked, on the prow of the new boat.

At one-thirty-four in the afternoon, the wake of a passing craft rocks the fishing boat, which lurches, creaks, and finally swings free. It floats. ♦

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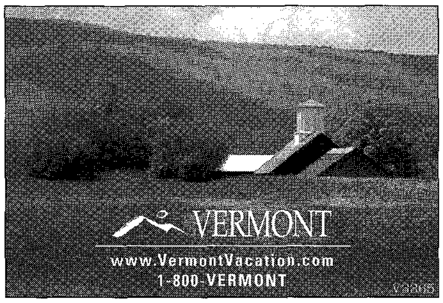

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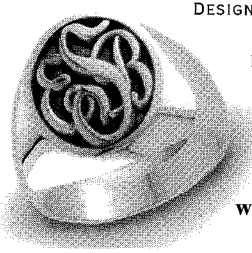

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

FROM ACROSS THE POND

BY IAN FRAZIER

Ah, America! Every image of it in the films is true, I thought to myself, as my oily-featured driver sped through amber lights and babbled maniacally into his radio. The familiar smell (for this was my third visit) of a place near the airport called Queens came to my nose. Which queen, or queens, were referred to, however, no one could say. Power and greed and Machiavellian scheming filled the very air along the avenue we travelled on—Jackson Avenue, I think it was, no doubt named in honor of the famous American pop star possibly born nearby. Ferret-eyed mafiosi, underage prostitutes, neighborhood drug runners, confidence tricksters, and dreary lumpen nobodies swarmed at every crossing and roundabout. Lying back on the odoriferous upholstery, I drank in the teeming totality through every pore.

A very few of these strivers, the extraordinarily lucky and clever ones, will someday rise above their station and grab the whip hand in their country's ruthless hierarchy. Countless others will descend to the level of the mass murderer and tabloid reader in wretched rented flats, there forever to remain. I planned to steep myself in both extremes, for both are the quintessence of America. Suddenly and sharply I called out to my driver to stop the taxicab. A street-side news vender, with an apparent nonchalance belying the untouchable lowness of his trade, approached my partly open window. I knew what the fellow wanted as well as he did—my fifty cents (American) in return for a current issue of the scandalously lurid *Daily News*. I tossed him the coins and he pocketed them, then turned in search of other prey.

Appraisingly I eyed my purchase. There on its cover—which for some reason appeared on the back of the publication rather than the front, and upside down—was a photo of the man I had crossed an ocean to meet and interview. Even from that odd position, his commanding, charismatic eyes locked with mine. A thrill of consent ran through me involuntarily; one could understand at a glance why those who knew him called George Steinbrenner "The Boss." Forget the clichés about his business acumen, forget the neo-puritan tut-tuttings over his felony conviction, and note instead the debonairness of the Steinbrenner style. A nearly feral magnetism seemed to shimmer from his surprisingly unpretentious blazer, slightly outthrust chin, and iron-filing hair and teeth. Ruling his empire of sports teams had given him the extravagant habits of unlimited authority. His acquisitions, his tantrums, his perfectionism—all have been widely reported on, along with his enormous personal fortune, said to be the largest in much of the world.

Imagining our upcoming meeting, I had to suppress the urge to shout with excitement like a third former at a football match. (N.B.: In America, what we call football they call, for some reason, "soccer," and what they call "football" is something else entirely.) After all, this was the man famous for sacking an unruly employee not once but five times! How would this raw, untutored, childlike American genius respond to me? Would he dismiss me out of hand? Or would he perhaps be so taken with me and the article I plan to write that he offered me a situation in his front office, where I would vet the many top sports players whose services he procures? And then, perhaps, I would go on to make a big splash in his organization, win the admiration of "Fran" Healy and "Joe" Torre, and secure a fabulous salary as Herr Steinbrenner's chief aide and factotum. I would own a penthouse flat on Fifth Avenue, travel on the Concorde every weekend . . .

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Steinbrenner is not available at the moment," I practiced, in my severest tones. "This is Mr. Steinbrenner's highly paid personal executive assistant. Mr. Steinbrenner cannot come to the phone because he is visiting his private holdings in Tampa, Florida. For the record, Mr. Steinbrenner has authorized me to say that some of his coaching staff did not perform up to standard during the previous post-season. He names no names. The guilty parties know they have much to answer for. . . . What? I *beg* your pardon? Do you have any *idea* whom you are talking to? Who do you think you *are*?"

Overhearing this, my poor cabman cringed even lower behind the steering wheel at the forcefulness of my voice and manner.

Yes, a position with the Steinbrenner firm would be right up my street. And I would be perfect for the firm as well. Once I had stamped it with my own unmistakable watermark, Mr. S. would begin to confide in me. In the posh cabin of his private jet on our way to an exciting awards luncheon, I would reveal to him the outline of my grander plans. "This game your sports team plays all summer, George," I could hear myself explaining, "it's so byzantine, so of the past. The few times I've watched it on the television, I've absolutely loved it, of course. But not everybody does, I must tell you. 'Thumb-suckingly boring' is one of the kinder adjectives used. We must *do* something about that game, George.

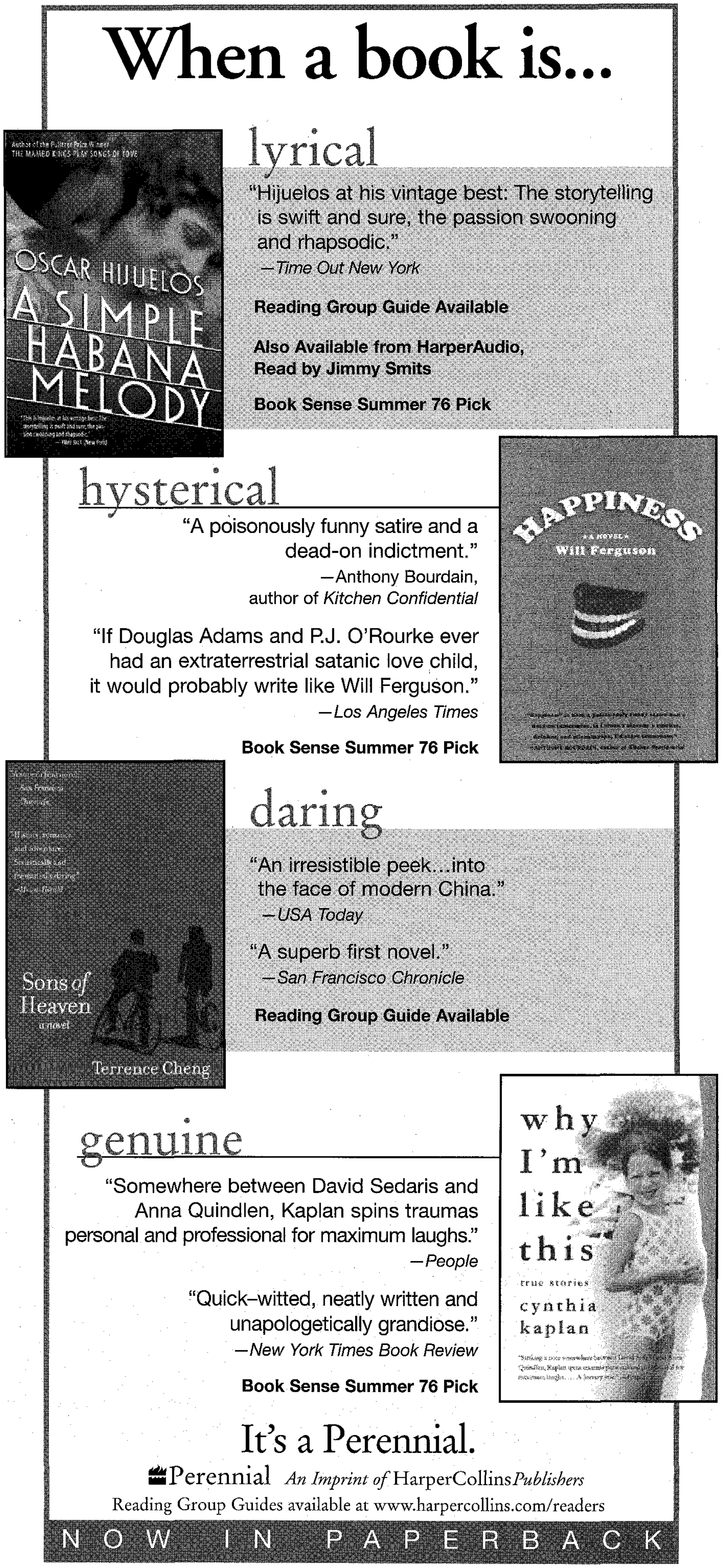
"And while we're on the subject, George," my inner monologue continued, "may we take a look at some of the people in your employ? This fellow 'Zip' Zimmer, for example—now, George, what exactly are this man's duties? Does anyone, including himself, even know? And what of this television and radio presenter, this Rizzuto? Is 'Scooter' really a name you want associated with any person to whom you give serious responsibility? My advice is to sack the lot of them at once, George, and begin completely anew!"

With a jolt that brought me back to earth, my taxicab stopped at the door of New York's most luxurious five-star hotel, the Q Motor Lodge, in Queens. I alighted on the pavement and retrieved my cases from the boot. My sneering, fawning driver appeared for his much coveted fee and, once paid, sidled back into his reeking vehicle and careered off into the night. After handing my luggage to a bellman who later turned out to be merely a passerby, I received my key and ascended to my room, on the second floor. (N.B.: In America, what we call the first floor is their second, because they call what would be our ground floor their first, making their second floor one floor lower than it is for us, which nonetheless somehow does not reduce the overall height of their buildings.)

Arrived, at last! The door to my demi-suite clicked shut behind me with a subtle, moneyed sound. I strode across the room, detouring round the bed, and drew back the window curtains. There before me stretched a panorama of this vast American city in all its mystery: to my left, the wall of what appeared to be, from its many ventings, a launderette; to my right, adjacent to the wall, a car park of ten or twenty spaces, beneath a street lamp with flickering bulb. Somewhere in that fecund, brutal, half-civilized land lay the answer to my dreams.

For a long moment I stood by the window. Then I stepped back and saw, superimposed on the view, my own face reflected in the glass. I could not help but notice how much I had changed just since Heathrow. Add one of those billed sports caps the Americans love to wear and an undershirt splashed with advertising, and I would be indistinguishable from a native. I made a mental note to buy myself both those items first thing tomorrow. Then I would go in search of the city's main outdoor arena stadium—it could not be hard to find—and proceed with my grand design. Already, however, my mind was vaulting beyond immediate achievements to others I could not even imagine, waiting invisibly offstage. As they began to take vague form I deliberately dismissed them, in order to preserve the surprise.

Now to work. With pen and stationery provided gratis by the hotel, I sat down to record my impressions thus far. ♦



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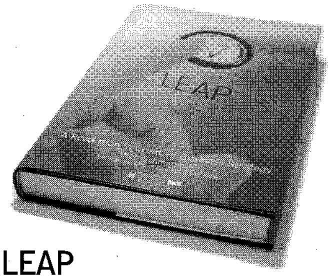

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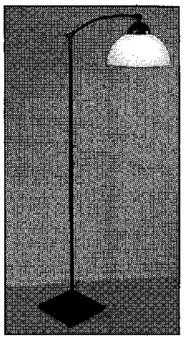

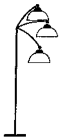

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WEST SIDE FIXER-UPPER

New ideas for Lincoln Center that don't involve dynamite.

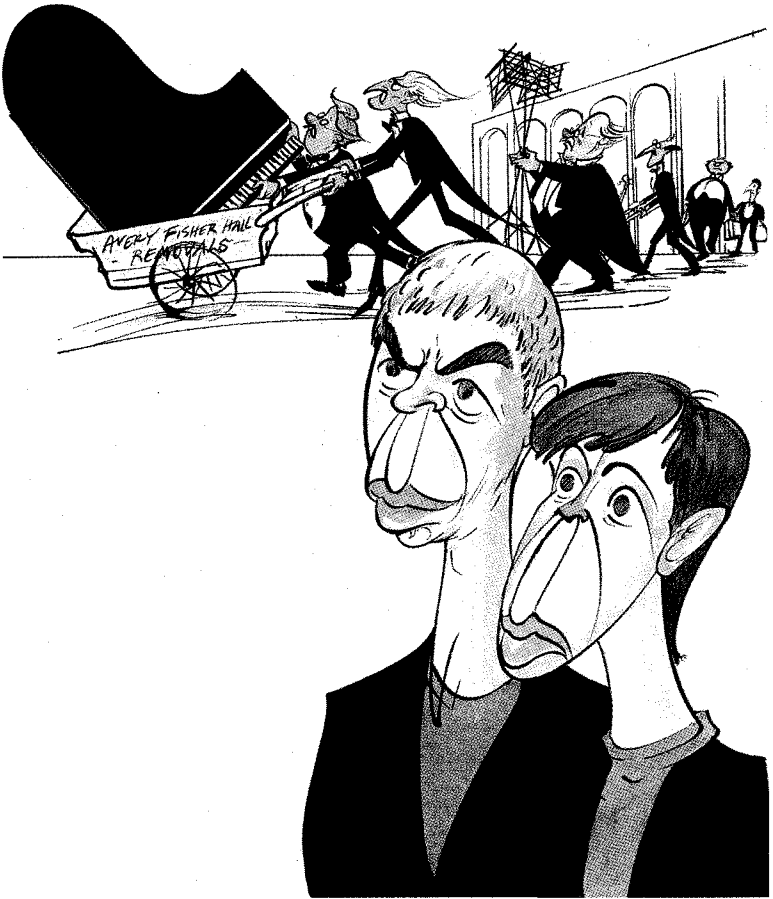
BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

In the mid-fifties, when Robert Moses came up with the idea of Lincoln Center—a performing-arts complex that would make the depressed West Side of Manhattan respectable and provide the impetus for large-scale urban renewal—most of the city's performance venues were old, and people thought they should be replaced, not restored. The Metropolitan Opera House, on West Thirty-ninth Street, had sight-line problems, a cramped backstage, little room for storage, and inadequate rehearsal space. The company had been trying to relocate for nearly fifty years. The New York Philharmonic was particularly desperate, since its lease at Carnegie Hall was about to expire, and, in any case, the hall was going to be torn down to make way for an office building. The Philharmonic was the first tenant to move into Lincoln Center, in September, 1962. The New York State Theatre opened less than two years later, then the Vivian Beaumont, and the Met in the fall of 1966.

There were complaints about the facilities at Lincoln Center from the beginning, and persistent squabbling among the various institutional constituents, so it didn't come as much of a surprise to hear, a year or so ago, that the New York City Opera was talking about putting up a new hall miles away, at Ground Zero. Having struggled for years to produce operas in a building that was designed to muffle the sound of toe shoes on the stage, why shouldn't City Opera have a place of its own? But when the Philharmonic announced recently that it was leaving, too—moving back to Carnegie Hall, which, of course, hadn't been torn down after all—it was pretty clear that Lincoln Center was in serious trouble.

It's not likely that either the Philharmonic or City Opera would have bolted if its hall had been more suitable. Avery Fisher Hall—which is what Philharmonic Hall has been called since 1973—is widely thought to be an acoustical disaster and has been resistant to tinkering, despite a complete reconstruction in 1976. But the raison d'être for Lincoln Center was dubious from the beginning. It originated with Robert Moses, not Leonard Bernstein, and Moses didn't care much for opera, or theatre, or symphony orchestras. He just figured that they could serve as a magnet for development. Using culture in this way was a new idea in the fifties, although almost everything else about Lincoln Center was stuck in the past. As a piece of design, it was as retrograde as the halls that it replaced—and much less successful.

Moses first proposed that the new arts complex be built at Columbus Circle. He would have set the Philharmonic and the Met behind the building that eventually became the New York Coliseum. When that plan didn't work out, he moved up the street to Lincoln Square and expanded the notion to include the New York City Ballet, the Juilliard School, and a new repertory theatre. John D. Rockefeller III signed on as the first president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and Wallace K. Harrison, who had been more or less the Rockefeller house architect since the early days of Rockefeller Center, was asked to start making plans for the new Met, which would be the focal point of the complex, and to coördinate the choice of architects for the other buildings. Harrison asked a few of the architects he admired, including his partner Max Abramovitz, Alvar Aalto, Marcel Breuer, I. M. Pei, Pietro Belluschi, Edward Durell Stone, and Philip Johnson, to come to his office for a two-week-long *charrette*, or architectural work session. Pei and Stone did not respond, but the others came, and the *charrette* produced numerous schemes, including a proposal by Breuer to place all the buildings on stilts and one by Aalto that had a central plaza entirely enclosed by buildings, somewhat like the Piazza San Marco in Venice. Harrison and Abramovitz at one point concocted a plan that would have put the entrance to Lincoln Center at the corner of Sixty-fifth Street and Broadway, where Avery Fisher Hall now stands. There wasn't much of a consensus about what should be done, except in the case of Belluschi's idea of facing all the buildings in Roman travertine, which the architects reportedly agreed on instantly. Several months later, they decided on a roughly classical layout, with three buildings arranged around a formal, symmetrical plaza facing east.



Diller & Scofidio is redesigning some of Lincoln Center's public spaces.

GERALD SCARFE

In 1958, with a site plan in place, the board of Lincoln Center made the final selection of architects, rejecting Aalto because he was not based in the United States, and Breuer because he was believed to be too rigid. The roster was, nonetheless, a sampling of fifties stars. Harrison gave Abramovitz the commission to design Philharmonic Hall, Johnson was assigned the dance theatre that became the New York State Theatre, Eero Saarinen the repertory theatre, Belluschi the Juilliard School, and Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill the library and museum of the performing arts. Because Harrison tended to be a passive leader, the much more assertive Philip Johnson had a great deal to say about both the design of the central plaza and the architectural style of the three main buildings. Johnson was moving away from modernism and starting to embrace a kind of decorative classicism at the time, and the dominant architectural style of the main buildings reflected this, while the less conspicuous buildings off to the side were permitted to be more modern. (Johnson wanted to impose an even stronger classical sensibility on the place by running a delicate, columned arcade all the way across the east side of the plaza, meaning that you would have entered Lincoln Center through his gateway.)

The process of designing the individual buildings was something of a horror, since each architect had to produce a plan that would be acceptable not only to the people who ran the performing-arts organization that would occupy the building but also the organization's board of trustees, the board of Lincoln Center itself, and the city. It was architecture by bureaucracy, or, rather, by four layers of bureaucracy. Harrison's first designs for the new Metropolitan Opera House were spectacular, even daring. One resembled the General Assembly Building of the United Nations, for which Harrison had been the lead architect. Another seemed based on Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House design. But the Met had no more interest in being a patron of contemporary architecture than it had in being a producer of contemporary opera, and Harrison was sent back to the drawing board time and time again. In each instance, he returned with a design that was more conservative, more constrained, and more compromised than the last. The final version, his forty-third—produced after Rockefeller ordered that budgets be cut by twenty-five per cent—was the smallest, meanest, and dullest of them all, and it got built. It bore almost no resemblance to Harrison's original concept. Abramovitz's concert hall and Johnson's dance theatre endured similar if less severe compromises. The designs ended up awkward, overdecorated hybrids.

Like the World Trade Center, Lincoln Center epitomizes a certain kind of postwar urban design: formal, boxy, set on a podium, and altogether indifferent to the streets of New York. Architectural theorists of the time believed that the best way to save the city was to suburbanize it. The podium exists mainly to provide parking garages and automobile drop-off space underneath the buildings. It is the exact opposite of the situation at Carnegie Hall, which is enveloped in the swirling energy of the city streets.

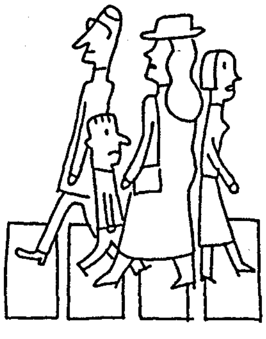
People often say wistfully that we couldn't possibly afford to take on big projects like Central Park or the George Washington Bridge now, and that we probably wouldn't agree about how to build them if we did have the money. Yet they rarely talk of Lincoln Center that way. Lincoln Center would never be built today because the premises on which it was conceived are no longer convincing. The idea of a cultural campus set apart from the city never made much sense, even though Lincoln Center did, to be fair, promote the urban-renewal effect that Robert Moses intended. The neighborhood would probably have been gentrified without Lincoln Center, of course, but hardly in the same way, or on the same timetable.

As the surrounding area filled with condominiums and restaurants, however, Lincoln Center has sometimes seemed less the vibrant source of the neighborhood's energy than the empty hole in the middle of the doughnut. Often there is more buzz on the sidewalk in front of the multiplex theatre a couple of blocks north, or amid the parade of mall-like retail stores that now line Broadway, than there is at Lincoln Center. Even though the center's various plazas are the major public squares of the neighborhood, they are for the most part cold and uninviting, and do not function as destinations in themselves, the way public space in a city ought to. Except for those occasional evenings when the weather is mild and the great central fountain is spouting, there is little about the plazas to attract anyone who is not heading to a performance. And if you approach Lincoln Center from what is supposed to be its front, facing the intersection of Columbus Avenue and Broadway, you have to navigate thirteen lanes of traffic. It isn't much easier to enter on the north side, from Sixty-fifth Street, where the plaza arches over a wide street and you feel as if you were going through a tunnel. From the west, the complex presents a solid wall, turning its back on the Amsterdam Houses, a public housing project. Although Robert Moses had little to do with the design, Lincoln Center reflected his social philosophy, which was on the side of public subsidies for middle-class amenities and against the visible presence of the poor. As for the wonderful benefits that would come from putting the city's major performing-arts institutions together on a kind of modernist Acropolis—the other notion used to sell the project—it seems no more sensible than putting AOL and Time Warner together to create a hypothetical synergy.

The effort to remake Lincoln Center architecturally began in 1999, before the City Opera started talking about leaving, when the architects Beyer Blinder Belle were asked to study the complex and figure out how to improve it. They evaluated the condition of the Lincoln Center buildings, all of which are aging and in need of serious renovation. Marshall Rose, a civic-minded real-estate developer on Lincoln Center's board, was put in charge of an effort to fix up the complex. He established a new organization called the Lincoln Center Constituent Development Project, and hired Rebecca Robertson, who had run the Forty-second Street redevelopment project in Times Square, to head it. Rose then brought in the architectural firm of Cooper, Robertson & Partners (no relation to Rebecca Robertson) and asked them to join Beyer Blinder Belle in producing a master plan. In search of a big idea, Rose put Cooper, Robertson together with Frank Gehry, who suggested that a huge glass dome be erected over the main plaza. Gehry's dome was to be the centerpiece of a $1.2-billion program that would include another major renovation of Avery Fisher Hall, some updating at the Met, the New York State Theatre, the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, and the Juilliard School, and improvements to the public spaces.

Beverly Sills, who was then the chairman of Lincoln Center, had doubts about the Gehry plan. "A glass dome? We're going to have to heat it and air-condition it and clean the pigeon poop!" she said to the *Times*. "Which constituent would like to pay for that?" Joseph Volpe, the general manager of the Met, hated the idea of the dome, and he announced at the beginning of 2001 that the redevelopment plan was being handled so badly that the Met wanted nothing to do with it. Gehry was gone by the end of the year. The dome was a notable failure for him, if you can call something that never got past the preliminary design stage and was never even made public a failure. It wasn't so much an architectural failure—it might have been quite beautiful—as a conceptual and political failure. He seemed to be trying to keep a lot of dead architecture safe by putting it indoors.

Marshall Rose had resigned in October, 2001, when Sills failed to back Gehry. Almost a year later, he was replaced as chairman of the redevelopment project by Peter Lehrer, the founder of a large construction management firm who had been involved in projects like the Statue of Liberty restoration and Canary Wharf in London. Lehrer resigned in mid-June this year, less than two weeks after the Philharmonic announced that it was going back to Carnegie Hall. Lehrer had clashed with Rebecca Robertson, and he told the *Times* that "a lot of money has been spent on planning with not enough to show for it."



Lincoln Center needs, desperately, a shot of adrenaline. In December last year, after the Gehry plan had been cast aside, the husband-and-wife architectural team of Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio was interviewed by a committee made up of the center's trustees and administrators, which had started to look for another architect to redesign the complex's public spaces. Diller and Scofidio are best known for works that appear to straddle architecture and conceptual art, and they seemed less like serious candidates than like token representatives of the avant-garde, the sort of architects who get put on search lists so that the boards of large cultural institutions don't appear to be out of touch. Norman Foster and Richard Meier were also being interviewed, and feelers had been put out to Santiago Calatrava. It seemed likely that one of the megastars would be hired.

Diller and Scofidio designed three postcards to present to the committee. They called the first one "the image of Lincoln Center that you want to send to your friends." It was a picture of the fountain in the main plaza with the Metropolitan Opera House in the background—the view of Lincoln Center that everyone knows. The two other postcards were considerably less appealing. One showed the sterile landscape around the reflecting pool in front of the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, and the oppressive platform-bridge over West Sixty-fifth Street, which connects the central plaza to Juilliard. The other postcard depicted the empty concrete bandshell in Damrosch Park, at the desolate southwest corner of the complex.

The postcards were meant to demonstrate that Diller and Scofidio could talk in terms that non-architects—like the financiers and arts patrons on the committee—would understand, and that they hadn't come to sneer, which is what some of the other architects being interviewed did. "One architect went so far as to say that more than Avery Fisher Hall

BLACKBERRIES FOR AMELIA

Fringing the woods, the stone walls, and the lanes,
Old thickets everywhere have come alive,
Their new leaves reaching out in fans of five
From tangles overarched by this year's canes.

They have their flowers, too, it being June,
And here or there in brambled dark-and-light
Are small, five-petalled blooms of chalky white,
As random-clustered and as loosely strewn

As the far stars, of which we now are told
That ever faster do they bolt away,
And that a night may come in which, some say,
We shall have only blackness to behold.

I have no time for any change so great,
But I shall see the August weather spur
Berries to ripen where the flowers were—
Dark berries, savage-sweet and worth the wait—

And there will come the moment to be quick
And save some from the birds, and I shall need
Two pails, old clothes in which to stain and bleed,
And a grandchild to talk with while we pick.

—*Richard Wilbur*

should be ripped down," Bruce Crawford, who succeeded Sills as chairman of Lincoln Center, told me. "But Diller and Scofidio demonstrated there was something exciting you could do with this place without being in awe of it." Diller and Scofidio also exhibited a kind of modesty that, in the current economic climate, Lincoln Center was eager to embrace. (No one is talking about billion-dollar budgets anymore.) And by choosing to make two of their mock postcards views of ugly, uninviting parts of Lincoln Center, they showed that they had no illusions about how much work there was to be done.

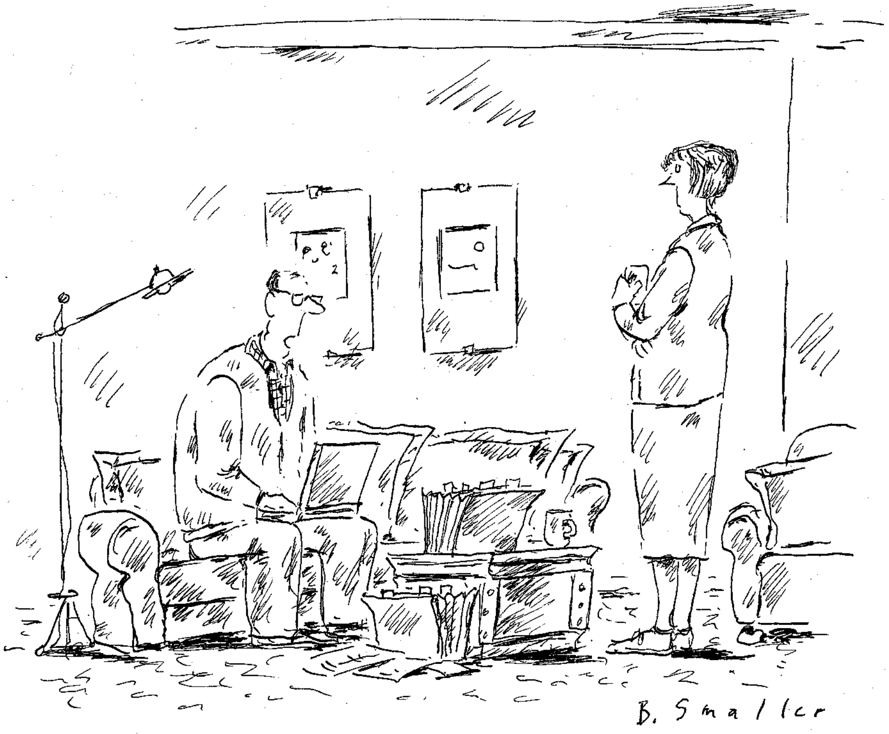
Diller and Scofidio got the Lincoln Center job just a couple of weeks after a retrospective exhibition celebrating their career as radicals and architectural gadflies opened at the Whitney Museum. The exhibition didn't focus much on their architectural work, because there hasn't been much of it to show. They became famous for projects like the Blur Building, a pavilion at an international exposition in Switzerland in 2002 that consisted of a platform engulfed in mist. It was meant to de-materialize the experience of being in a building, to make it feel like standing in a cloud. More recently, they were commissioned to create art for Terminal 4 at Kennedy Airport, and they lined the long corridors leading from the planes to customs with a series of plasma-screen panels illustrating personal dramas involving travel—a couple breaking up in Paris, people losing treasured possessions. The narratives comment slyly on the difficulties of travel and the vapid nature of most travel advertising, but the installation is also a genuine attempt to relieve the boredom of walking through the corridors. Diller and Scofidio believed that a kind of high-tech interpretation of the old Burma Shave signs could transform the experience far more effectively than a conventional, decorative architectural element.

The Whitney exhibition included several hundred toy robots on a moving conveyor belt, which was intended to evoke the experience of passing through airport security. The robots' glass case looked as if it could have been designed by Mies van der Rohe. Diller and Scofidio love technology and architectural space, and they are fascinated by the ways in which they intersect. Some of their ideas will be put to the test in a new museum building they have designed for the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston, but their greatest test, surely, will be at Lincoln Center. Two of this country's most determinedly avant-garde architects have been given the task of renovating what is probably the most conservative, not to say politically byzantine, cultural institution in New York.

"We opened our presentation by saying we really love Lincoln Center," Scofidio says. "They were shocked. They hadn't expected to hear that from an architect"—particularly from a firm with the reputation of being on the cutting edge. But Diller and Scofidio were expressing a growing affection among younger architects for the architecture of the nineteen-sixties. They seem to feel that if everyone else thinks the stuff is so bad, then maybe it's worth looking at more carefully.

Diller and Scofidio put together a video of computer-generated images that proposed such things as an enormous rectangular fabric roof, like a vast umbrella, that could be mounted on the corner of Avery Fisher Hall. It would rotate over the main plaza of Lincoln Center or over the north plaza in front of the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, or back over Avery Fisher Hall, where it would turn into a tent covering a rooftop dining area. This wouldn't alter the main plaza permanently, as Gehry's dome would have, but it would protect it both from rain and from the intense sun that renders it nearly unusable on hot summer days. And it would provide a visual change. The plaza is now defined so completely by building façades and pavement that it looks oddly the same at all times of the year.

Diller and Scofidio's video also proposed carving out a section of the main plaza and turning it into a gigantic elevator platform that could ascend from the concourse level, bringing crowds up from the subway and the garages. When moved up a few feet higher, it would become a performance stage on



"If we take a late retirement and an early death, we'll just squeak by."

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the plaza. They suggested replacing Damrosch Park with a landscaped hill, beneath which would be tucked a structure containing office and rehearsal space. Actually, the hill would be more like an undulating, grassy roof that would be at its highest at the south end of Lincoln Center, and would form a kind of amphitheatre as it descended toward the south side of the Met. Their most original ideas were focussed on the north plaza, which now contains the reflecting pool in front of the Vivian Beaumont and the bridge across Sixty-fifth Street. The video included designs for ramps that would rise from the level of Sixty-fifth Street up to the plaza through a grid of trees planted at street level, so that you would feel as if you were ascending through the trees as you walked toward the main theatres. The architects also proposed carving out some of the space under the reflecting pool for public use and having the pool appear to cantilever out over this space, like a water-covered roof.

Diller and Scofidio were told to start work immediately on the first phase of the project, a redesign of the northern edge of Lincoln Center, which is the part no one likes. (Gehry had been fiddling with the main plaza around the central fountain, which is more likable, however seldom it actually gets used.) They are having discussions now with the various Lincoln Center organizations, and will present a formal proposal sometime in the fall. It's unlikely that many of the ideas that Diller and Scofidio presented last winter will be intact in their final design, but they wouldn't have been chosen if the only thing they were expected to do was spiff up the old travertine. Hiring them was a commitment to rethinking the architecture of Lincoln Center in a way that is more radical, paradoxically, than anything Frank Gehry was preparing to do.

The plan will focus on West Sixty-fifth Street, which was bloated to interstate-highway width when the center was constructed. The street will be narrowed, the bridge over it removed, and restaurants and high-tech signage installed along the block. Diller and Scofidio want to make it a conventional street, but with a twist. They are also studying ways to reconfigure the traffic under the podium, and to reduce the number of entrances for vehicles and provide better access for pedestrians. The plaza around the reflecting pool will be redesigned, with more seating space and possibly another café. (The architect David Rockwell is already designing a pair of screening rooms for the Film Society of Lincoln Center that will go under the pool.) The empty triangle of space in front of Alice Tully Hall would be filled in with a building that could include a bookstore. The idea is to introduce the urbanity that Lincoln Center's original designers rejected.

Lincoln Center isn't going anywhere, whatever we think of it, and Diller and Scofidio are figuring out ways to weave the atoll back into the fabric of the city. They don't want to obscure the fundamental qualities of the architecture, but they feel that they can play with the podium itself. "Rather than thinking of the plinth as an object, think of it as a surface whose edges can be bent up and down," Diller said to me. "The street warps its way up to the plaza. The plinth is relentless, but we want to create a topography that is less relentlessly horizontal."

The strength of Diller and Scofidio's conception here underscores something that was clear from their retrospective exhibition earlier this year at the Whitney: for all their talk about architecture as a form of social criticism or performance art, their real passions are traditional. They believe that architecture should encourage social interaction, and they believe in the purity and power of formal composition. They love exploiting the latest technology, but they use it to embellish and reinvent traditional urban space, not to escape it.

The challenge of redesigning Lincoln Center is to know the difference between the parts of it that always worked and may simply be out of fashion, and the parts of it that don't work at all and have to be fixed. With the World Trade Center gone, Lincoln Center is the one true temple of nineteen-sixties architecture on a grand scale that New York has left. It's too important a place to get rid of, and it's too awful a place to leave the way it is. ♦

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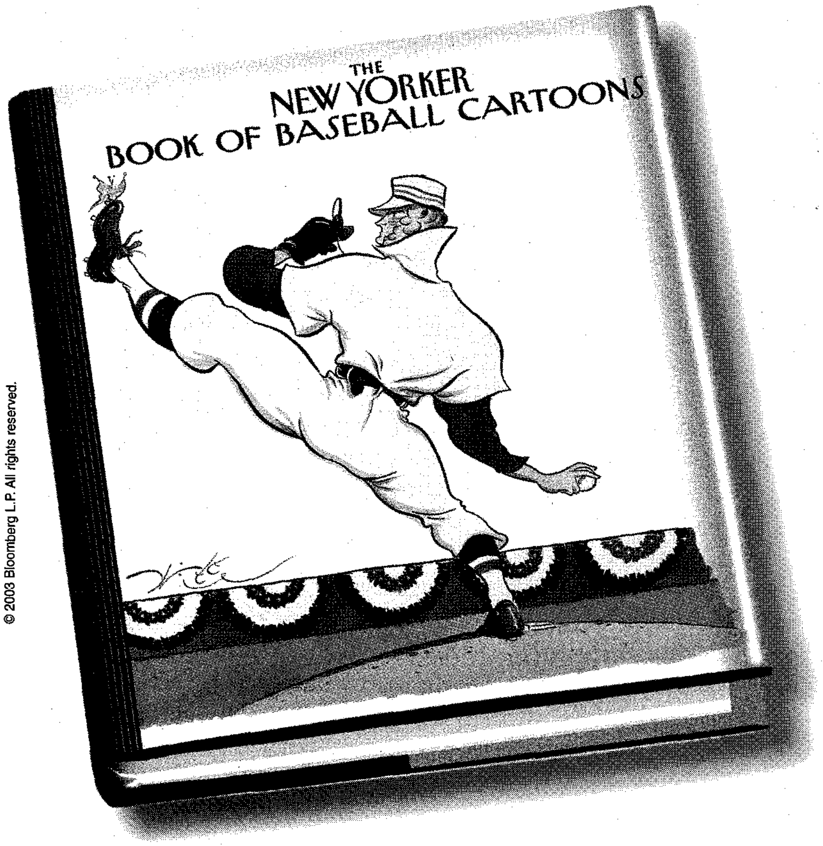
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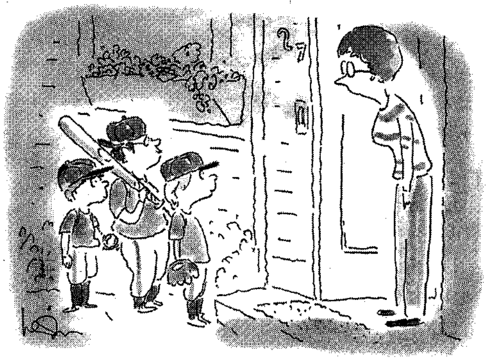

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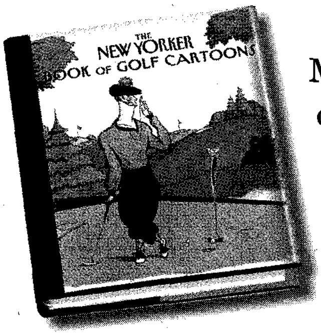
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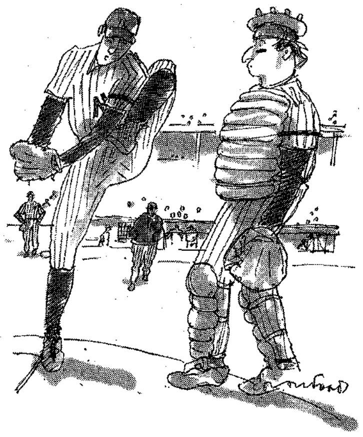

"Gimme a hand—I'm stuck."

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE MONEY NOTE

Can the record business survive?

BY JOHN SEABROOK

When he was a teen-ager, growing up in New York City in the nineteen-seventies, Jason Flom wrote songs, sang, and played guitar for two rock bands, which he named Relative Pleasure and Selective Service. But Flom's dreams of rock stardom ended around the time he started working at Atlantic Records, in 1979, when he was nineteen, and began redirecting his energies into making other people stars. Now forty-two, he is one of the most successful record men of the past twenty years, scoring hits in genres as varied as heavy metal (Twisted Sister), Celtic pop (the Corrs), and rock (Matchbox 20, Sugar Ray). Altogether, his artists have sold more than a hundred million CDs.

In an era when many of the top-selling acts have "flava"—the edgy sound of hip-hop artists and R. & B. singers and rap-metal groups, who emerge from niches and achieve broad recognition—Flom has continued to have success with pop music, that sweet, beguiling, never-too-challenging sound which has been a record industry staple from Bing Crosby to Doris Day to Britney Spears. Flom's specialty is delivering "monsters"—records that sell millions of copies and become rainmakers for everyone else in the record business, because they bring fans into the music stores. Successful record men are commonly said to have "ears," but prospecting for monsters requires eyes for star quality as well as a nose for the next trend. You have to be able to go to thousands of sweaty night clubs, and sit through a dozen office auditions each week, and somehow not become so jaded that you fail to recognize a superstar when you encounter one. Like the night in 1981 when Clive Davis, then the head of Arista Records, happened to go to a New York supper club and hear a nineteen-year-old gospel singer who was Dionne Warwick's cousin—Whitney Houston. Or the day when Bruce Lundvall, the head of Blue Note Records, had a routine office audition from a singer recommended by an employee in the accounting department—Norah Jones. Or the time in 1997 when Flom met Kid Rock, then an obscure m.c. who had made a couple of records that "stiffed" (sold poorly), in the basement of a Detroit disco at two-thirty in the morning. It is necessary to recognize that ineffable quality a great pop star communicates (Flom calls it "the thing"), but it isn't always necessary to love the way the music sounds. Chris Blackwell, who founded Island Records, told me that he didn't especially like listening to U2 when he first heard them play, in the early nineteen-eighties, but "I could see that they had something," and so he signed them to his label.

Why should the latent capacity for superstardom in pop, which is perhaps the most egalitarian of art forms, be obvious to only a gifted few like Jason Flom—those great A. & R. (artist-and-repertoire) men whom the record industry celebrates as its heroes? (And they are invariably male.) After all, even the great record men are wrong much more often than they are right about the acts they sign (nine misses for each hit is said to be the industry standard). One wonders how much of the art of hit-making is just dumb luck. Scientists in Barcelona say they have created a computer-based "Hit Song Science" that picks hits much more efficiently than a human can. There's even a Web site, hitsongscience.com, where aspiring pop stars can test themselves on a hit-o-meter.

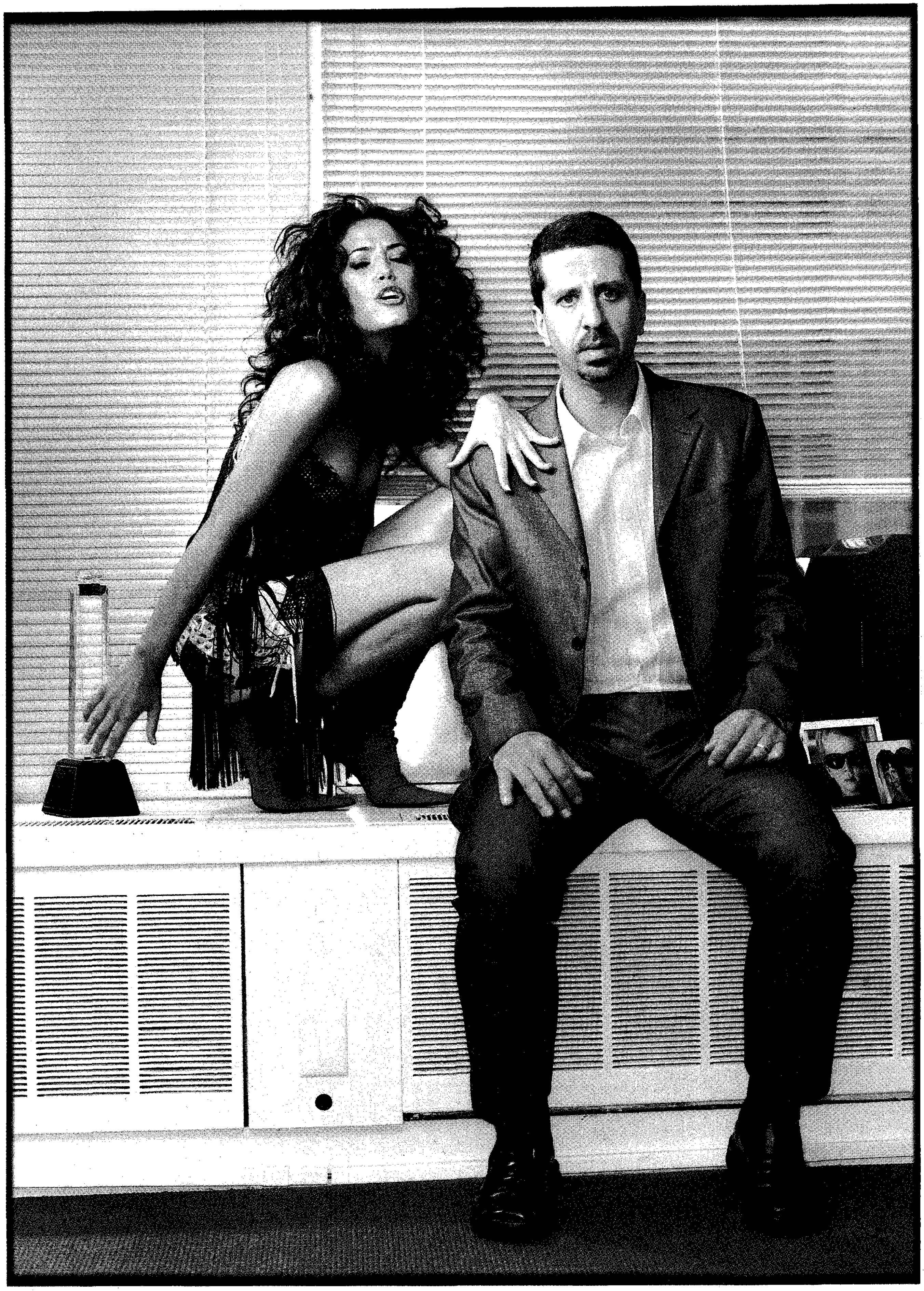
"American Idol," the popular "Star Search"-style Fox TV show, in which the viewers pick their own stars by voting over the telephone, is considered a "reality show," but the democratic process is not the way stars are actually discovered. In the record business, a few guys still determine the fare of many.

One day last October, I was sitting with Flom in his office at Atlantic, which is part of the Warner Music Group, at Sixth Avenue and Fifty-first Street, when he played me a song by a new artist he had recently signed to his label, Lava Records. (Flom began the label as a joint venture with Atlantic, and then sold his share to the company two years ago, for a reported fifty million dollars.) Lava has a roster of twenty-three artists, and Flom can afford to take "a big bet," as he puts it, on two or three new artists a year. The artist's name was Cherie, he explained, and she was a young French singer whose specialty was the sweeping pop ballad. She was a "belter," as they say in the business—one of those singers who don't hold back.

Flom often has a startled expression in his eyes, as if he were waiting for something to go wrong—a look of disappointed optimism, the feeling that anyone who makes a career out of betting on talent must routinely suffer. But today he looked positively grim as he talked about the record business. Sales of recorded music in the United States have dropped by more than a hundred million units in the past two years, falling well below seven hundred million. The eighteen-year-old Canadian singer Avril Lavigne is the idol of ten-year-old girls across the country, but her début album, "Let's Go," sold far fewer records in its first six months (four million) than did Alanis Morissette's début album, "Jagged Little Pill" (seven million), which was released in 1995. Around the globe, the record business is sixteen per cent smaller than it was in 2000. Record labels blame the fans, for lacking the long-term loyalty to pop acts which record buyers used to have, and for engaging in wholesale "piracy" of music, either by copying CDs or by downloading music illegally from the Internet. "There is no precedent for what's happening now in the music business," Flom said. "What would happen if groceries suddenly became free, or hotels—do you think those businesses would survive?"

However, Flom brightened at the prospect of playing Cherie's demo CD. "I guess you'd call her a diva," he said. "She's

CORBIS SABA



Cherie with Jason Flom, who says, "We just have to figure out how to make her a big star." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

seventeen, and she's classically trained, but she sings these pop ballads—and she is phenomenal." He was excitedly hunting for the demo amid the stacks of disks that cover every surface in his office. "I honestly believe she is one of the most important artists I've ever signed." Seeing the skeptical look on my face—a French pop star?—Flom quickly said, "She's also Jewish, and there aren't too many of them left in France, if you know what I mean, so it's a little different from being just French. And," he added, "she doesn't sound French when she sings."

Flom lacks the star quality that he divines in other people. He is neither tall nor physically imposing, and he seems more like a laid-back lawyer than like a record man (his father is Joseph Flom, a patriarch of the New York law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom). He is a friend of Bill Clinton's, and a generous supporter of the American Civil Liberties Union. He is not wild and crazy, although his office, like the offices of most record executives, is full of photographs of him posing with wild and crazy guys such as Kid Rock, who usually has his middle finger extended in the picture. During the nineteen-eighties, Flom tried living like a rock star, but when he was twenty-eight he checked into the Hazelden clinic, in Minnesota, for thirty days of rehab, and he hasn't had a drink or a line since. Now he lives with his wife and their two kids on the Upper West Side.

He had never heard Cherie sing before she and her manager, Jeff Haddad, turned up in his office the previous February, on Valentine's Day, for an audition. Haddad had given Flom his pitch, which, Haddad told me later, included this question: "There are maybe twenty people in the world who can deliver a song the way Faith Hill sings the Diane Warren song that is the theme in the movie 'Pearl Harbor,' and out of those people how many can do it in four different languages?" Then Cherie performed two songs, one in French and the other in English; her only accompaniment was the noisy heating system in Flom's office. On the basis of that half-hour meeting, and Flom's gut feeling that the girl, whose real name is Cindy Almouzni, had that special quality which can move a massive amount of product, Flom signed her to a million-dollar, five-album contract, and was prepared to do everything that a major label like Warner can do to make an artist a big star—"Whatever it takes to put her over," Flom told me. He declined to say how much that would cost, but David Foster, another top hitmaker with Warner Music, told me, "It's basically a five-million-dollar bet. It might cost only five hundred thousand dollars to make the record, but it's so expensive to promote it. If you get on the 'Today' show, you've got to get a band together, fly everyone in and put them up, and by the time you're done it has cost you fifty thousand dollars."

Last year, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a story about an unknown eighteen-year-old Irish singer named Carly Hennessy, whose début CD, from Universal, was the subject of a $2.2-million marketing campaign yet wound up selling only three hundred and seventy-eight copies in its first three months. "If that happens to me," Flom said, "a lot of people are going to look at me funny." For the artist, the stakes were higher. "This is her shot. It's very rare for an artist to get a buildup like this and then, if things don't go well, come back from it and reinvent herself."

The song Flom played for me that day in his office, "My Way Back Home," is a love ballad written for Cherie by the Canadian singer-songwriter Corey Hart, who has also composed songs for Céline Dion. The lyrics are solidly within the convention of self-help, which is one of the main tropes of the popular love ballad. The singer is finding her way through the darkness, and, in spite of winter storms, bitter cold, and loneliness, manages to reach high and touch the sky, and to find . . . My Way Back Home. It was a surprising choice from the man who gave the world Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It," although perhaps this is Flom's genius—understanding how a conventional love ballad and a heavy-metal anthem stimulate the same adult-contemporary emotions. As Doug Morris, the head of Universal Music Group, who was Flom's mentor when Morris ran Atlantic, said to me, "The basic thing is you've got a singer, and you've got a song, and you put them together and it makes people feel good. And if they feel good enough they buy it! That's what it's all about! And it's a beautiful thing when you see it happen—the singer up there singing his song and all the fans are screaming for him. It makes me wanna cry, when I see it."

And Cherie's voice *was* remarkably appealing. She had the vocal power of Whitney

"How'd you know I was from New York?"

Houston and the feel-good-around-the-edges shimmer of Shania Twain. But she wasn't a screamer; she could sustain the note at the end of a phrase without resorting to vibrato. She hit the high notes effortlessly, could soar from tragedy to triumph in a single breath, and seemed to inhabit the lyrics with complete sincerity. As the chorus rolled around for the second time, I sensed that the song was building toward an emotional climax that people in the record business sometimes refer to as "the money note"—that moment on the record which seems to have an almost involuntary effect on your insides. (According to researchers at Dartmouth who recently studied the brains of people listening to music, the brain responds physiologically to dramatic swoops in range and pitch.) The money note is the moment in Whitney Houston's version of the Dolly Parton song "I Will Always Love You" at the beginning of the third rendition of the chorus: pause, drum beat, and then "Iiiiiieeeeeeiiieeii will always love you." It is the moment in the Céline Dion song from "Titanic," "My Heart Will Go On": the key change that begins the third verse, a note you can hear a hundred times and it still brings you up short in the supermarket and transports you from the price of milk to a world of grand romantic gesture—"You're *here* / There's *nuth*ing I fear."

David Foster, the producer of "I Will Always Love You," who is among the contemporary masters of the pop ballad (he has written and produced songs for Natalie Cole and Toni Braxton, among others), says that he came up with the expression during a session with Barbra Streisand. "Barbra had hit this high note, and she wanted to know how it sounded, because although you'd think Barbra was real confident she's not," he told me. "And I said, 'That sounds like money!' " He added, "And I don't mean money in the crass sense of that will make a lot of money, although that's certainly part of it. I mean expensive. It sounds expensive."

Cherie hit the money note with full force—"When I cry I'm weak / I'm learning to *fly*." As her voice went up on "fly," an electric guitar came floating up with it, and the tone was so pure that a chill spread over my shoulders, prickling the skin. Flom pumped his fist when the moment hit, lifted his leg a little, and grimaced.

When the song ended, he asked me what I thought, and I admitted that I had found the money note shattering. But would it produce the reaction Flom was looking for—the effect he had mimed for me earlier, by taking an imaginary wallet from his back pocket, fingering an imaginary bill, and slapping it down on an imaginary counter? What was to stop people from taking the money notes for free?

Flom pointed out that Cherie's music, like that of Norah Jones, should appeal to older people, who are less likely to download music from the Internet. "But who knows?" he said. "It's difficult to compete with free. All I know is what I know—if the star is big enough, people will buy the album, because it's like a piece of the artist. But if the star doesn't have that kind of irresistible appeal then people just say, 'What the heck, I'll download the good songs.' So we just have to figure out how to make her a big star."

MAKING MONSTERS

Five global music companies control more than eighty-five per cent of the record business. (The remaining fifteen per cent is divided among some ten thousand independent labels.) Universal Music Group, which is owned by Vivendi Universal, is the dominant player among the majors; then comes the Warner Music Group, a division of AOL Time Warner; Sony Music Entertainment; the Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG); and the EMI Group. From the early seventies to the mid-nineties, Warner was the leading company in the record industry, but by the end of 2002, with a sixteen-per-cent share of the domestic market, the company had fallen behind Universal, which had a twenty-nine-per-cent share.

The story of Warner Music is a parable for the music industry—a tale of corporate dyssynergy. Over the course of the rock era, which began almost fifty years ago, virtually all the original record companies have been bought by larger media corporations. The industry has changed from an art-house business run by the founders of the labels—men with ears, like Ahmet Ertegun, a founder of Atlantic; Chris Blackwell, of Island Records; and Jerry Moss, the co-founder, with Herb Alpert, of A&M Records—into a corporate enterprise run by managers, who in addition to making records have to worry about quarterly earnings and timely results.

Atlantic Records was co-founded in 1947 by the Turkish-born Ertegun, with money borrowed from the family dentist. He began by recording artists like Ray Charles and the New Orleans juke-joint bluesman Professor Longhair. In the nineteen-fifties, Ertegun, working with his partners—his brother Nesuhi and Jerry Wexler, a writer for *Billboard*—had a string of hit records with singers like Ruth Brown and Big Joe Turner, before the dominant power in the music business, CBS Records (now owned by Sony), discovered the commercial possibility of black R. & B. music. In the mid-sixties, Atlantic expanded into pop (Bobby Darin, Sonny and Cher) and, later, into rock (Buffalo Springfield). In 1968, Ertegun sold the label to Warner-Seven Arts, and the following year Steve Ross's Kinney National bought that company, creating Warner Communications. During the nineteen-seventies, the collection of Warner labels assembled by Ross, and run by the legendary record man Mo Ostin (including Atlantic, Warner Bros., Reprise, Elektra, and Asylum), eclipsed those of CBS, and Warner became the leader of the record industry. Its acts included the Grateful Dead; Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; the Eagles; Fleetwood Mac; and the Doobie Brothers. "Steve Ross never got involved in anything we did," Ertegun, who continued to run Atlantic after its sale, told me. "He was just happy to see the results." But as Warner Communications grew—it merged with Time, in 1990, and AOL, in 2001—the music business faltered. Ross, who might have been able to run the labels effectively, died in 1992, and Gerald Levin took over.

The business rationale behind the record companies' role in these huge conglomorations was that their corporate owners would use the cash generated by monster hits to pay for other parts of their operations, and the companies would be able to survive the stiffs, thanks to their corporate backing. Corporate ownership also gave record men like Ertegun the financial resources to compete for expensive established acts, like the Rolling Stones, whom he signed in the nineteen-seventies. However, it gradually became apparent that the corporate culture might not provide the best environment for nurturing new talent. Chris Blackwell, who sold Island to PolyGram in 1989 (he now has another independent label, Palm Pictures), told me, "I don't think the music business lends itself very well to being a Wall Street business. You're always working with individuals, with creative people, and the people you are trying to reach, by and large, don't view music as a commodity but as a relationship with a band. It takes time to expand that relationship, but most people who work for the corporations have three-year contracts, some five, and most of them are expected to produce. What an artist really needs is a champion, not a numbers guy who in another year is going to leave."

Moreover, the kind of controversy that often helps sell records is not good for the corporate image. In the mid-nineties, Warner was well positioned to control the exploding rap market, through its half ownership of Interscope, a label that had been developed by the producer Jimmy Iovine and had recently signed Tupac Shakur. Interscope was allied with Death Row Records, the label run by Dr. Dre and Marion (Suge) Knight, which recorded seminal gangsta-rap acts like Snoop Doggy Dogg. But bad publicity from these acts was hurting Time Warner's other businesses and straining the political connections that the corporation needed in Washington. In 1995, Levin made the decision to sell the company's half share of Interscope, and it eventually became part of Universal. Iovine went on to amass a remarkable streak of hits, including records by Eminem and the rapper 50 Cent. Warner missed out on the rap boom almost entirely.

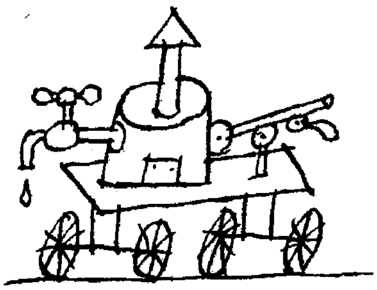
In the past three years, under the leadership of Roger Ames, a suave, cigarette-smoking, fifty-two-year-old Trinidadian, who took over the Warner Music Group in 1999, the company has had major hits with Linkin Park, Enya, and Faith Hill. Ames has also cut costs to improve profits. However, Warner is fourth among the majors in sales of new music and did not have a record on the list of Top Ten-selling albums in 2002:

1. "The Eminem Show" / Eminem, 7.6 million (Interscope).
2. "Nellyville" / Nelly, 4.9 million (Universal).
3. "Let's Go" / Avril Lavigne, 4.1 million (Arista, a BMG label).
4. "Home" / Dixie Chicks, 3.7 million (Sony).
5. "8 Mile" / Soundtrack, 3.5 million (Interscope).
6. "Missundaztood" / Pink, 3.1 million (Arista).
7. "Ashanti" / Ashanti, 3.09 million (Murder Inc., Universal).
8. "Drive" / Alan Jackson, 3.05 million (Arista Nashville).
9. "Up" / Shania Twain, 2.9 million (Universal).
10. "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" / Soundtrack, 2.7 million (Universal).

But is a winner-take-all strategy the best way to run a record company—for any of the majors? Hit-making is an imprecise method of doing business. Of thirty thousand CDs that the industry released last year in the United States, only four hundred and four sold more than a hundred thousand copies, while twenty-five thousand releases sold fewer than a thousand copies apiece. No one seems to be able to predict which those four hundred and four big sellers will be. The chairman of BMG, Rolf Schmidt-Holtz, told *Billboard* in December, "We need reliable calculations of returns that are not based solely on hits because the way people get music doesn't go with hits anymore." He added, "We have to get rid of the lottery mentality."

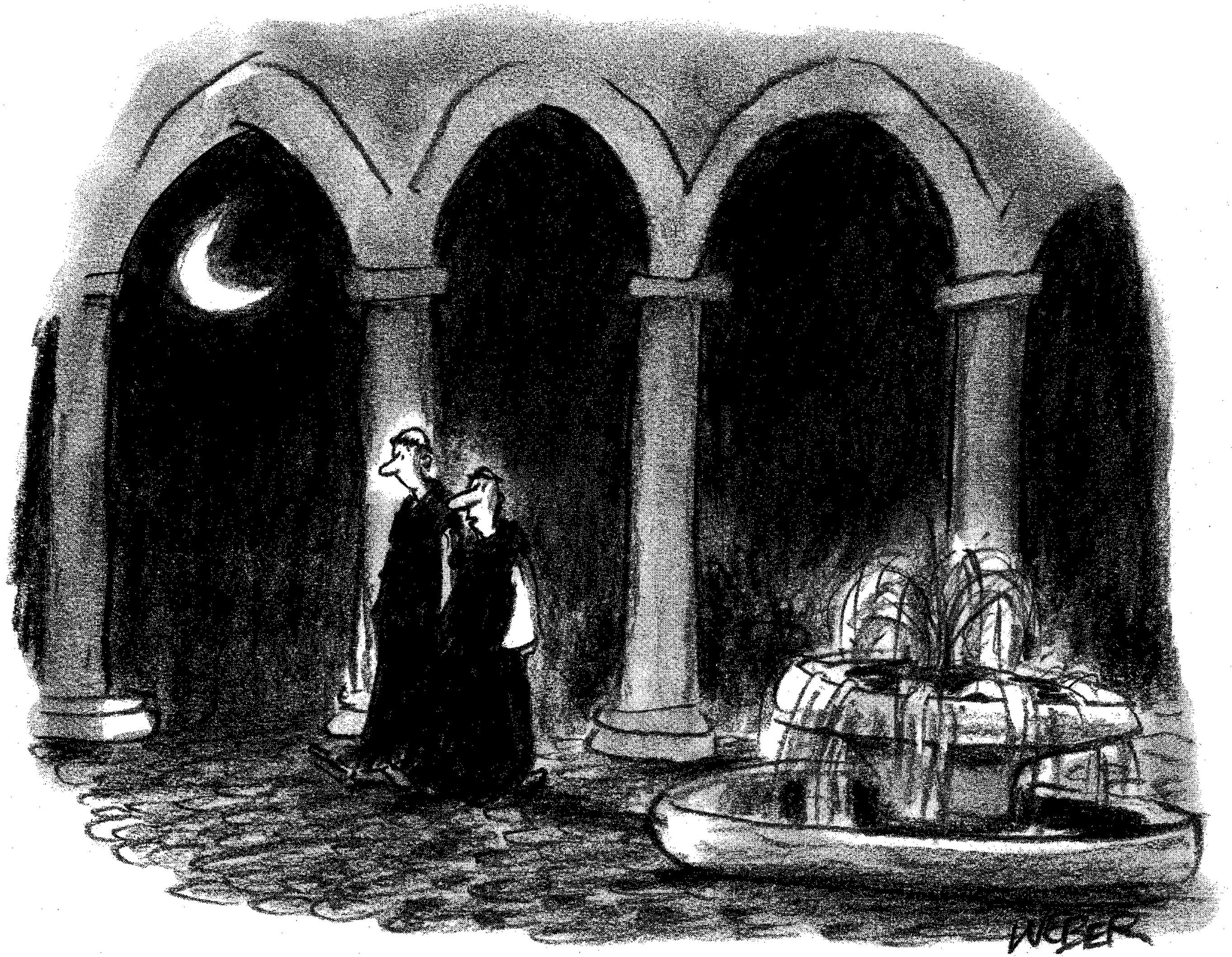
I asked Flom whether he thought hits might become less important to the record business. "That ain't gonna happen," he said. "If anything, hits can be more important than ever, because you can make stars on a global scale now. If the star is big enough, people will want to buy the CD." When I repeated what Schmidt-Holtz had said, Flom looked momentarily stunned. Then he said, "Something must be getting lost in the translation there, because the day we stop seeing hits is the day people stop buying records."

When Cindy Almouzni was eight, in 1992, the video of the Whitney Houston song "I Will Always Love You" came out, accompanied by shots of the singer playing opposite Kevin Costner in the film "The Bodyguard." Cindy was the youngest of three children in a religious household in Marseilles. Her parents are Sephardic Jews from North Africa. As a child, her father fled during the Algerian war, and met his wife years later in France. When Cindy's mother was too busy to watch her, she would put her in front of music videos on TV. Cindy learned "I Will Always Love You," exactly the way Whitney sings it—the breathing, the key change in the third chorus—and she sang it over and over again. At first, she sang the song to herself, then to her family, and then in school. The summer that she was nine, she sang "I Will Always Love You" for several hundred people at a campground where the Almouznis went during August.



Her parents sent her to singing school, and after that she received private lessons. She learned the songs of Jacques Brel and Edith Piaf, but she also continued to sing "I Will Always Love You." At fourteen, she won a local karaoke contest, and went to Paris for a national competition. There, she met a record producer, who invited her to his studio to record a song he had written called "I Don't Want Nobody (Telling Me What to Do)." The vocals were remixed, and the song became a dance track, which wound up in the hands of Jeff Haddad, a languid, affable Californian. "I heard her sing, and she blew me away, and I thought, Let's do what we can to make this happen," Haddad told me. He flew to France to meet her parents, and they agreed to let him try to make their daughter a star.

Haddad is a manager, but, like many other people in the music industry—producers, songwriters, engineers, lawyers—he functions as a filter between undiscovered talent and a major-label deal. He and Dave Moss, the owner of a small record label, put out a single of Cindy's dance song, and it became an international hit for Cherie Amore, as they decided to call her, back in 2000, when there was a vogue for French house music. On the strength of that success, Haddad commissioned a British songwriter and producer named Paul Moessl to create a pop ballad for Cherie. Moessl wrote a song called "Older" ("My love is older than my years/It's wiser than your fears"). There was considerable interest in the demo, and Haddad scheduled a week of office auditions in L.A. and a week



"I always feel a tad secular on Saturday nights."

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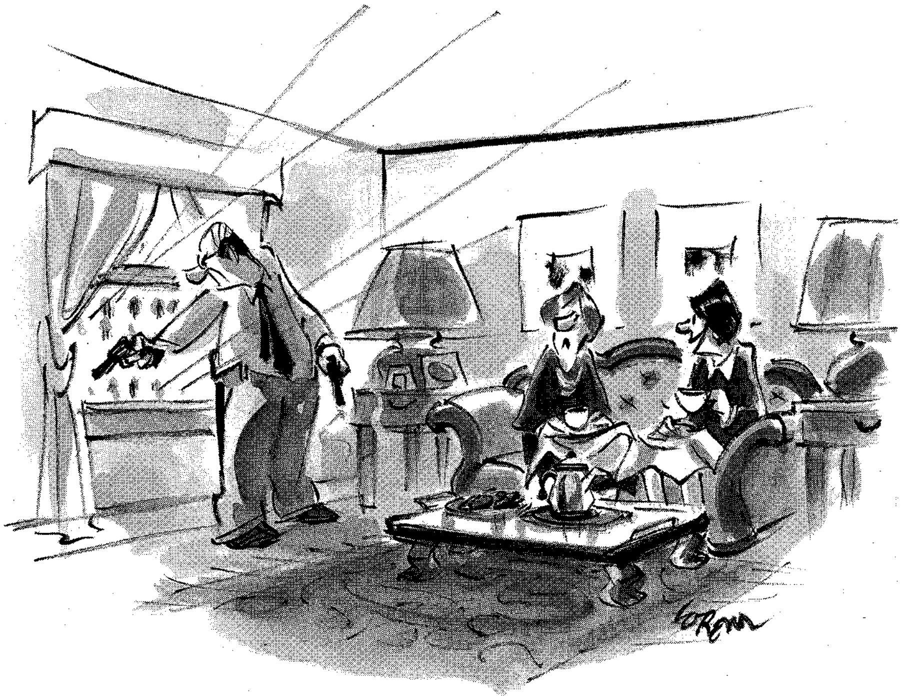
in New York, with people like Tommy Mottola, who was then the head of Sony Music. It was cold in New York, and people were coughing and sneezing while Cindy sang. Jason Flom was the last record guy they saw. "Within thirty seconds of hearing her sing," he said, "I just knew." In Cherie, Flom encountered a singer whose artistic sensibility was derived from the kind of commercial music that record men like Flom produce—her flava was pop. He signed her within a week.

The traditional course in star-making is to begin with a local fan base and gradually grow to global renown. Flom was proposing to market Cherie the other way around—she would appear on the scene as a "worldwide artist," with campaigns in France, Italy, England, and Spain, as well as in the United States. Although the music industry more or less invented the hit, it has struggled to make songs and artists into the kind of global properties that movies have become. (The recent film "X2" opened simultaneously in ninety-five countries.) Music is supposed to be the universal language, but pop depends on regional associations, and on language, which is why the charts in France and Spain and Germany are so different from the pop charts in the United States.

Last summer, Flom presented his future star at the Warner Music Group summit meeting, held in Barcelona and attended by affiliates from more than a hundred and thirty countries. ("There were some affiliates from countries I didn't even know they had records in," Flom said.) Cherie was a hit, and Flom and Haddad decided that she should sing several of the tracks on her début album in Spanish and French, as well as in English. They solicited songs from successful pop songwriters, like Kara Dioguardi and Paul Barry, and they hired producers who had scored hits in European and South American countries to work on possible singles for those countries.

Flom told me that in some ways Cherie's youth and obscurity were advantages in making her into a worldwide sensation. Stars often balk at travelling to other countries to perform, and don't want to keep up the relentless schedule of public appearances which is necessary to sustain a hit record. "The nice thing about Cherie is she's portable," Flom said. "She'll go places and do stuff if we think she should do it."

But, if Cherie truly is an extraordinary



“Howard works from home.”

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artist, why not build her career more slowly? “In an era like this,” Flom said, “when the audience has more distractions than ever, you have to reach critical mass to put an artist over. And the outlets you need to do that, the *Teen Peoples* and whatever, are not going to take you seriously unless they know you are putting a major push behind it.”

Of course, it was possible that Flom was wrong about Cherie’s talent. Perhaps she wasn’t a great artist; maybe she was merely a great karaoke singer, and the audience would be able to tell the difference. On the other hand, maybe the current pop scene is a “karaoke world”—the phrase that the pop impresario Malcolm McLaren uses to describe contemporary pop culture—in which all the great artistic statements have already been made, and the newer artists are merely doing karaoke versions of their predecessors.

In November, I attended a marketing meeting in Flom’s spacious corner office to draw up an outline for launching Cherie’s career, or, as they say in the business, “blowing her up.” Seven Lava staff members were in attendance: Richard Bates, creative; Nikki Hirsch and Lee Trink, marketing; Aaron Simon, product management; Doug Cohen, video promotion; Janet Stampler, new media; and Lisbeth Cassaday, publicity. Before the meeting started, Aaron Simon told the others about the experience of having Cherie sing for him, in the office. “I was, like, ‘Do you want me to close the door?’ ” he reported. “And she was, like, ‘No, it’s cool.’ And she just did it right there. And it was, like—chills.”

Flom began by saying that they hoped to take the first single, probably a mid- to up-tempo dance number, to American radio in June, 2003. When record guys hear fans complaining that pop music has become too commercial, they are often quick to blame radio. Radio doesn’t play as much new music as it used to, they argue, and the music that is played has to fit into a certain format, which is based on research about what people like to listen to—or, at least, will tolerate. Many stations also carry between fifteen and twenty minutes of commercials an hour. (“If anyone said we were in the radio business, it wouldn’t be someone from our company,” Lowry Mays, the founder and C.E.O. of Clear Channel, which is the country’s largest radio-station operator, with some hundred million listeners nationwide, told *Fortune* in March. “We’re not in the business of providing well-researched music. We’re simply in the business of selling our customers products.”)

Cherie’s music fits almost perfectly into the adult-contemporary format, radio’s largest; Flom thought that Cherie was tailor-made for New York’s WLTW 106.7 Lite-FM, the city’s most popular music radio station, which is owned by Clear Channel. Jim Ryan, a programming executive there, told me that when Flom played “My Way Back Home” for him, along with two other songs, during a car ride home from an industry event, he said, “Jason, I want to quit my job at Clear Channel and sign up on the Cherie bandwagon.”

With luck, Flom went on, Cherie’s first single would be a hit, and would cross over from the light-FM stations to the Top Forty stations. At that point, Lava would release the second single, a ballad. Flom was also looking at other ways to promote Cherie. One was a Time Warner DVD, a Batman movie called “Batman: Mystery of the Batwoman”; Cherie was being animated in the film as a sexy singer whom Batman encounters in a late-night *boîte*, and who sings a song called “Betcha Neva” (a song that would be on Cherie’s album). He added that there had been tremendous interest in Cherie from “the soundtrack community,” especially from makers of animated films, and reminded everyone that Céline Dion’s big break came with the theme song from the Disney movie “Beauty and the Beast.” “I’m not saying she’s another Céline, but there’s a road map there.”

The group then discussed the possibility of getting Cherie a product-endorsement deal with a company like Revlon. As the expense of blowing up an artist increases, and the prospective payoff in record sales becomes ever more in doubt, the industry is shifting the cost of promoting artists onto advertisers. Sting’s 1999 album, “Brand New Day,” an Interscope release, sold sluggishly until the artist was featured in a Jaguar commercial singing music from the album—and then sales took off.

The staff addressed the subject of “imaging” Cherie—what kind of look the artist should affect. Cherie’s personal style was a work in progress. She was not a dressy kind of girl: she was partial to jeans. Richard Bates, the art director, said that in examining the images of current pop stars he had noticed that there was a middle ground between Britney Spears and Shania Twain, which no one was trying to fill. "The older singers are very polished and classy, and then it jumps down to young and trashy—which we don't want her to be," he said. The danger was that in trying to strike a balance between these extremes you might wind up with nothing at all. In photos from Cherie's first shoot, the artist, dressed in a sleeveless jersey and neat jeans, well scrubbed, her long hair pushed back from her face, looked as if she were ready for a college interview.

Lee Trink talked about making Cherie a keyword on AOL Time Warner's Internet service, and launching a "Who Is Cherie?" instant-messaging campaign.

The staff was undecided on the use of what Lisbeth Cassaday referred as "the 'd' word." Cassaday thought it was best not to call Cherie a diva; Flom wasn't so sure. "I mean, she is a diva, right?" he said. It was a conundrum. Operatic divas inhabit classic dramatic roles like Tosca and Madame Butterfly, but pop divas, one way or another, have to play themselves, which may be why pop divas wear out faster than operatic divas. The constant blowing up they require eventually causes them to explode.

Once the album went platinum—hit a million in sales—Flom said, they would go to the media with the story of Cherie's life. Flom reminded everyone that the artist was Jewish. He had heard that her synagogue in Marseilles was burned recently, and, "while this should obviously be treated as a very sensitive subject, we could go to Oprah and pitch her as an artist who has suffered violence in her life as a result of her religion."

Everyone nodded.

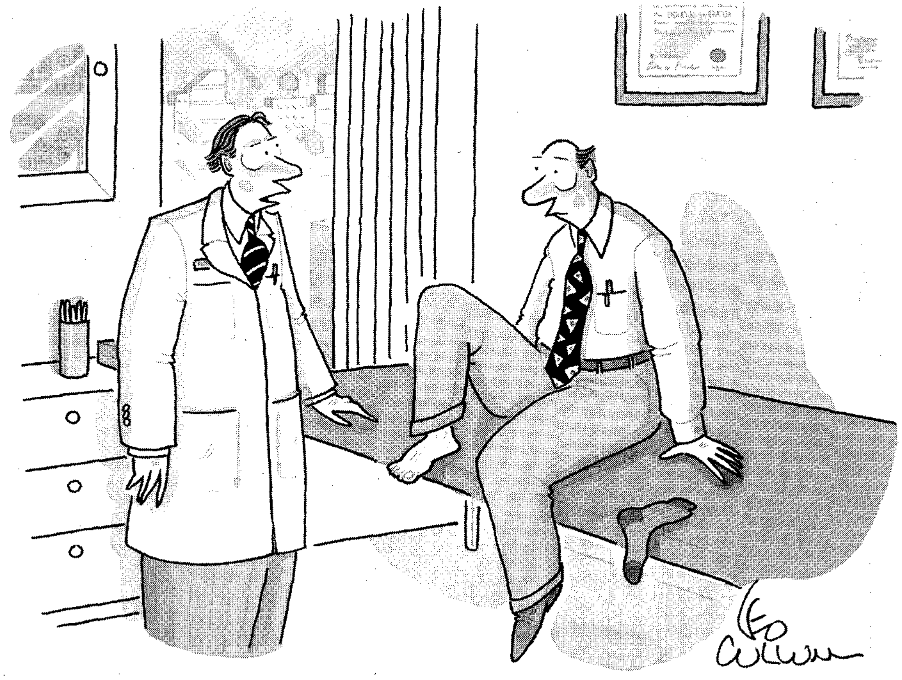
"You know. It's a story line."

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CD

In 1983, the president of PolyGram, Jan Timmer, introduced what he hoped would become the new platform for the sale of recorded music—the compact disk—at a recording-industry convention in Miami. Technically, CDs were a big advance over vinyl and tape. On a CD, music takes the form of digital strings of ones and zeros, which are encoded on specially treated plastic disks. If the disk is properly cared for, there is no "fidelity degradation"—none of those hisses and pops that vinyl develops over time. The high-tech allure of the CD would allow the industry to raise the cost of an album from $8.98 to $15.98 (even though CDs were soon cheaper to manufacture than vinyl records), and the record companies would get a larger share of money, because the industry would persuade artists not to raise royalty rates, arguing that the extra money was needed to market the new format to customers.

Timmer's group was booed by record men in the audience that day. This may have been because the co-inventors of the CD—Philips, which was a corporate partner of PolyGram, and Sony—wanted a patent royalty on the disks. The booing, however, also reflected the music industry's long history of technophobia. A hundred years ago, music publishers were trying to sue player-piano makers out of existence, fearing that no one would ever buy sheet music again. In the nineteen-twenties, the music industry sued radio broadcasters for copyright infringement. Although history has repeatedly shown that new technologies inevitably bring opportunities and create new markets, the industry's attitude toward new technology remains hostile. (Technophobia is also rampant in the film industry: in 1992, when movie studios were suing Sony over the Betamax, claiming that it was a threat to the film business, Jack Valenti, the president of the Motion Picture Association of America, said, "The VCR is to the American film producer and the American public as the Boston Strangler is to a woman alone." Fortunately for the movie industry, it lost the Betamax case: today, videos and DVDs account for more than fifty per cent of a studio's revenues.)

The CD, of course, turned out to be extremely popular with record buyers. Many fans who already owned music on vinyl dutifully replaced their records with CDs. By 1986, CD sales had climbed to a hundred million worldwide, and by the early nineties hit albums on CD were selling in greater numbers than hit albums on vinyl had sold. In 1999, in what now looks like hubris, the industry's trade organization, the Recording Industry Association of America (R.I.A.A.), created a super-platinum prize with which to honor the new megahits—the Diamond Award, bestowed on records that sell more than ten million copies. (Flom has two Diamond Awards, for Matchbox 20's "Yourself or Someone Like You" and for Kid Rock's "Devil Without a Cause.") CDs also turned out to be a brilliant way of repackaging a label's "catalogue"—all the recordings that were no longer in production on vinyl. CDs spawned a generation of record executives whose skill was in putting together compilations of exist-



"I'm sorry—I'm a left-foot podiatrist."

ing music, rather than in discovering new artists. Through the stock market crash of 1987 and the recession of the early nineties, the CD market grew steadily, until sales abruptly declined in 2001, by six per cent, and then dropped nine per cent in 2002.

Lyor Cohen, the head of Island Def Jam, which is owned by Universal, thinks that the record industry would have been better off without the CD. "The CD kept the whole business on artificial life support," he told me. Without it, the old record industry would have died in the early eighties, and a new, more modern industry would have replaced it. But the CD preserved the status quo. "The record business became a commodity business, not a content-and-creation business," Cohen said. He rubbed his fingertips together. "What was lost was *secchie*—it means 'touch.' "

Unlike Jason Flom, who has always worked at a record label, Cohen got his start as an artist's representative; he co-managed the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy. Now forty-three, he is tall and speaks with a slight Israeli accent. On the morning I visited Cohen in his office, in Manhattan, he was dressed in jeans and an expensive-looking dress shirt and was puffing on a cigar. He propped his size-13 New Balance sneakers up on his desk as he spoke.

"The A. & R. guys at the record companies had gotten a little older and didn't feel like standing in the back of some filthy hole to listen to a new band," he said. "So, instead, they started repackaging stuff from when they were younger. We got the theme album—'Summer of Love,' 'Splendor in the Grass,' whatever—and by the end of the eighties most of the industry's profits were in catalogue."

Finally, CDs made piracy possible, by making music much easier to copy. Had the platform never shifted from vinyl, the piracy problem wouldn't be nearly so bad. The zeal with which the labels flogged their catalogues on CD insured that a large amount of previously recorded music was rendered into digital form—almost none of it protected from copying. "None of us wondered what the digitizing of sound waves would mean to our business," Stan Cornyn, a longtime Warner marketing man, wrote in "Exploding," a recent history of Warner Music. "How fidelity degradation, which had

GEORGE BOOTH

held back some from making free tape copies, would no longer be a factor once sound waves got turned into digits. . . . Digital sound, being so casually accepted into our world, was free to cause an epidemic. It would make data copying easy, clean, free, and something that felt about as immoral as killing an ant."

During the past decade, virtually every piece of popular music ever recorded on CD has been "ripped," converted into a compressed digital file known as an MP3 (short for Moving Picture Experts Group Layer Three), and made available online, where anyone with a computer can get it. Once a song is converted into an MP3, it can be copied millions of times without any fidelity degradation. New music is ripped from CDs and uploaded as soon as the records come out (often before they come out, by studio technicians or by music journalists who receive advance copies). Music fans, who used to hear a song they liked on the radio, go to the record store, and buy the album, now hear a song they like on the radio, go to the Internet, and help themselves to it for free. Teen-agers who were once the labels' best customers are now their worst enemies. "Younger fans, at whom pop music is aimed, tend to be comfortable with computers, which is why downloading hurts the best-selling hits more than other kinds of music," I was told by Hilary Rosen, the departing C.E.O. of the R.I.A.A. "As a result, records that might have sold eight million copies now sell five. Unfortunately, these blockbuster sales pay for the development of new artists—Kid Rock pays for all the others." In 2002, the industry shipped 33.5 million copies of the year's ten best-selling albums, barely half the number it shipped in 2000.

Whether or not the record business figures out how to make money from MP3s, the format is here to stay. Just as CDs replaced vinyl, so will MP3s replace CDs. But, whereas CDs made the record business extraordinarily lucrative, MP3s are making it extraordinarily painful—a gigantic karmic correction that may lead to a bigger music business one day, although not before things get worse. Daniel Strickland, a twenty-three-year-old student at the University of Virginia, told me recently, "Maybe it's because I'm in college and I have an eighteen-year-old sister and a ten-year-old brother, but, let me tell you, nobody I know buys CDs anymore. My sister—she just gets on her computer, and she knows only two things, file sharing and instant messaging. She and friends go online, and one instant-messages the other, and says, 'Oh, there's this cool song I just found,' and they go and download it, play it, and instant-message back about it. My brother has never even seen a CD—except for the ones my sister burns."

Napster, the first widely used music-sharing software, appeared in 1999. It was based on a program developed by a nineteen-year-old college student named Shawn Fanning. Later that year, the R.I.A.A. charged Napster with copyright infringement, and, after a hearing in San Francisco, a California federal judge ruled against Napster and eventually closed the service down. But that action did almost nothing to diminish the availability of free music online; people simply began to use other file-sharing programs, like KaZaA, Morpheus, Grokster, and LimeWire. Unlike Napster, these programs, which operate on what are known as P2P (peer-to-peer) computer networks, have no central computer that keeps an index of all the files on the system. Instead, any computer using one of these programs can search and share files with any other computer using the same software. The number of people downloading music files over P2P networks today is thought to be many times greater than the number of people who used Napster at its height; by some estimates, fifty million Americans have downloaded music illegally.

The music industry has launched alternatives to the P2P networks—legal, online music services like Emusic, Pressplay, and Rhapsody. But so far these have failed to attract many fans, partly because they require users to pay monthly subscription fees, rather than selling individual songs and albums. Sony and Universal recently sold Pressplay to Roxio, a software company, which is expected to give its service a new, sexier-sounding name—Napster. Apple's iTunes Music Store, which was launched in April, selling downloadable songs for ninety-nine cents and albums for ten dollars, is the best-designed and best-stocked of the legal services, and the company sold three million songs in the first month of operation. Although sales have fallen sharply, other companies, including Microsoft, are reportedly planning similar services. Meanwhile, the labels are quietly beginning to harvest the marketing data on songs and artists that the illegal networks offer. Warner Music Group worked with Big Champagne, a company that mines data from the P2P networks, but Big Champagne's C.E.O., Eric Garland, isn't allowed to talk about it. "We are still very much the mistress," he told me.

In 2001, the R.I.A.A. joined the film industry in bringing a copyright-infringement suit against some of the larger P2P networks, including Morpheus and Grokster. But suing peer-to-peer networks isn't as easy as suing Napster; for one thing, there's no one to sue. (KaZaA is based on software that was commissioned by two Scandinavian businessmen. The programmers are Estonian. The right to license the program was acquired by Sharman Networks, an Australian company that has no direct employees and is incorporated in the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu.) Also, P2P networks offer a wide range of legitimate applications for research and businesses. In April, a federal judge in Los Angeles ruled that, because Morpheus and Grokster can be used for both legal and illegal purposes, the companies that distribute the software can't be sued for copyright infringement.

Last fall, several Microsoft programmers released a study of some of the social implications of P2P. They foresaw the networks converging into what the authors called "the Darknet"—a vast, illegal, anarchic economy of shared music, TV programs, movies, software, games, and pornography which would come to rival the legitimate entertainment industry. Unless the government does something about P2P, our entertainment industry could one day resemble China's, where piracy is endemic. With no means of support, many artists would be forced to stop working, and a cultural dark age would ensue. The movie industry, which is a bigger and more politically powerful force than the record business, has yet to see its profits eroded by illegal downloading, but it may be only a matter of waiting until DVD burners become the standard item in PCs that CD burners are now. Unlike the music industry, the film industry is incorporating copy protection into its digital recordings, but the Darknet is full of bright hackers determined to prove their mettle by breaking through the most robust encryption.

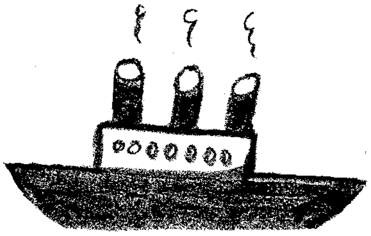
In the face of the recent legal setbacks in the R.I.A.A.'s campaign against the P2P networks, the organization's war on piracy has shifted toward the people who steal music. In April, the R.I.A.A. named four university undergraduates in a multimillion-dollar claim for copyright infringement, forcing them to pay between twelve thousand and seventeen thousand dollars each in fines. The day before the R.I.A.A. lost in the Grokster case, it won an important victory in a legal action against Verizon, when a federal judge in New York upheld a ruling that Verizon was required, under the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, to turn over to the R.I.A.A. the names of customers whom the record industry suspected of illegally sharing music files. (Verizon, which is in the business of selling broadband Internet connectivity, does not want to discourage potential customers, even if downloading music illegally is what they want broadband for.) Last week, the R.I.A.A. announced that it would begin preparing hundreds of lawsuits against individuals, charging the defendants up to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars per song. "It's easy to figure out whose computer is doing it," Hilary Rosen told me.

The record industry has also engaged in less conventional ways of harassing people who use P2P networks, including posting music files that are corrupt or empty, and has explored the legality of using software that temporarily "locks up" any computer that downloads it. Orrin Hatch, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, when asked a couple of weeks ago whether he favored passing legislation that would override federal anti-hacking laws, said that if other means of stopping illegal downloaders failed, "I'm all for destroying their machines. If you have a few hundred thousand of those, I think people would realize the seriousness of their actions."

Sir Howard Stringer, the chairman of the Sony Corporation of America, calls downloaders "thieves." "That's a reasonably polite way of saying it," he observed recently. "A shoplifter is a thief. That actress wandering around Hollywood helping herself, she was a thief. She should have adopted the Internet defense—'I was downloading music in the morning, downloading movies in the afternoon, and then I thought I'd rustle a few dresses out of the local department store. And it's been a good day, and all of a sudden I'm arrested. How is that fair?'" Many people I met within the record industry seem to regard today's music fans with disapproval. Tom Whalley, the head of Warner Bros. Records, said, "I think the audience is less loyal today than it used to be. The artist has to prove him- or herself with every new album; it feels like you're starting over each time." Fans I spoke to had, for their part, almost nothing good to say about the record industry. "I think the record companies are greedy pigs," said Oliver Ignatius, a fourteen-year-old music fan who lives in Brooklyn, and who knows as much about pop music as anyone I know. Ignatius is the type of fan a record guy would kill for: he downloads, but he also uses file-sharing services to discover new music and to research previously recorded material, and if he likes what he hears he buys the CD. He keeps his CDs in scrapbook-size folders, like a collection of stamps or baseball cards. Oliver thinks that the price of a CD should be six dollars. The industry is currently drawing the line at ten dollars—the price of downloading an album from Apple's iTunes Music Store.

One could argue that the record industry has helped to create these thieving, lazy, and disloyal fans. By marketing superficial, disposable pop stars, labels persuade fans to treat music as superficial and disposable. By placing so much emphasis on hit singles that fit into the radio formats, the record industry has created a fan who has no interest in albums. And the values of the people who share music illegally over P2P networks are, after all, rock-and-roll values: freedom, lack of respect for authority, and a desire for instant gratification—the same values that made so many people in the record business rich.

Still, one of the most galling things about the piracy problem, if you happen to be in the record business, is that not only are the fans gleefully and remorselessly taking the hits you make; they are doing so because they think you deserve it—it's your payback for ripping off artists with years of "plantation accounting." "I hope it all goes down the crapper," Joni Mitchell said of the record industry in *Rolling Stone* last year. "I would never take another deal in the record business. . . . I'll be damned if I'll line their pockets." The following month, in *W*, she called the record industry a "corrupt cesspool," saying that she was leaving the major-label system because "record companies are not looking for talent. They're looking for a look and a willingness to cooperate." (Mitchell's most recent album came out on Nonesuch, a Warner label.) As Malcolm McLaren observed to me, "The amazing thing about the death of the record industry is that no one cares. If the movie industry died, you'd probably have a few people saying, 'Oh, this is too bad—after all, they gave us Garbo and Marilyn Monroe.' But now the record industry is dying, and no one gives a damn."



SUNSET BOULEVARD

In December, I went to Los Angeles to visit the recording studio where work on Cherie's album was under way, and to meet the artist. Cherie had moved there in June, shortly after finishing school in France. The label had found her a house in Beverly Hills, and she was living there by herself, although Haddad was keeping a close watch over her. Her mother had come to help her settle in, but she had returned home to Marseilles.

Haddad briefed me on Cherie's schedule in L.A. "Her routine is very intense, and it's all about her," he said. "She gets up early, and she works out at home, sometimes with her trainer, then she does her voice lessons, and she does her English lessons, and if she's recording she spends afternoons and evenings at the studio, and if she isn't she meets with agents and movie producers and a bunch of other people who are interested in her."

Westlake Studios is in Hollywood, in a one-story building with blackout windows, at the corner of Santa Monica and Poinsettia. It's an expensive, state-of-the-art studio. These days, almost all the effects that were once only possible to create in a professional studio like this can now be achieved on a home computer with a software program. (A program called Pro Tools will even correct your voice when you sing off key.) Flom's reason for spending the money anyway, as I understood it, was: Anyone can make a record these days, but only a major label can make a really expensive record. This is what economists call "retreating upmarket," which is the classic response of an entrenched industry threatened with a disruptive technology.

Inside, Cherie, who had recently turned eighteen, was behind a glass wall that separated the recording area from the control room. She was singing "pickups"—the bits of the song in which the vocal needed work. Most of the pickups were the "U" sounds, where Cherie sounded most French.

At the controls of an immense mixing board was Humberto Gatica, a producer of hits by, among others, Céline Dion and Michael Jackson. Gatica had silver hair, a slight Spanish accent (he was born in Chile), and a voluble manner. Beside him, co-producing, was the songwriter Paul Moessl, who had written Cherie's original demo, "Older," and was the co-writer of the song they were working on now, "Fool." The musicians had already recorded their parts—the label had bought the services of the best studio musicians, including the rock star Beck's father, David Campbell, who specializes in arrangements for strings. Moessl estimated that there were fifty thousand dollars' worth of strings on the record. Now Gatica was mixing everything together on the hundred-and-twenty-track system.

Moessl, who was in his early thirties and had lank blond hair, said, "Did you pull down the crunchy loop?" referring to part of the complicated percussion mix.

"No," said Gatica, not taking his eyes off the flashing lights on the console. "I just took a little pressure off the snare."

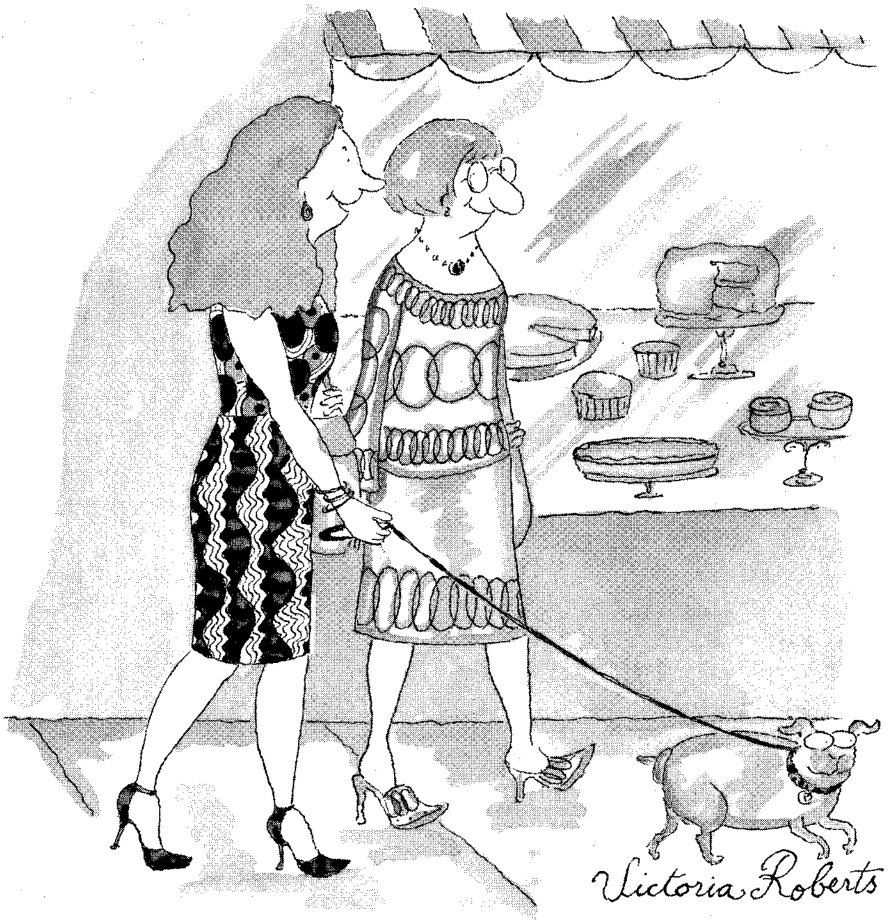
Moessl turned his attention to a volume on his lap, which was entitled "The Book of Positive Quotations." He was looking for ideas for lyrics for a new song he was writing with Cherie.

"If you are writing an artistic song, you write from inside yourself," he said. "You say, oh, I don't know, 'My dog died today,' or something like that. But if it's a commercial song you look for uplifting things."

The recording of the album had not been going as smoothly as Flom had hoped. For one thing, the songwriters were having trouble creating the right uptempo number for Cherie—the song that would become the all-important first single. "Ballads are about love," Flom explained to me, "but, at least for the last twenty years, most dance songs are about sex. But Cherie doesn't sing about sex. She sings about love. So we need a dance song about love. 'Push Push in the Bush' is not the right song for Cherie."

Gatica, his back stiff from bending over the mixing board, seemed to have become temporarily confused by all the sonic possibilities at his fingertips. He paused from his work, sat down with his head in his hands, and remained that way in silence for a minute or so. Cherie waited patiently for him to recover. Finally, he sat up and said, "I was riding in the car the other day, and an Annie Lennox song came on, from ten years ago or so—and, man, it was brilliant. Brilliant production. But now the kids don't want that sound anymore." He threw his hands in the air. "They want simple! Like it's made in a garage! So you do an expensive production like this one, made in a facility like this that costs many thousands of dollars a day, and then you end up grunging it up so that it sounds like it was made in a garage."

Cherie finished her pickups and emerged from the recording room. She wore a navy turtleneck, Levi's, black boots with pointed toes and stiletto heels, and silver bracelets on each wrist, which she twisted with her long, thin fingers. She wasn't as sultry as the animated Cherie in the Batman movie, but she was much more beautiful than she appeared in the label's first photo shoot, with dramatic cheekbones and striking dark eyes. When she smiled, her mouth went up in the middle but turned down at the corners, in a way that looked French. Her English was passable, and



"We went dutch—he must have reached his two-hundred-dollar dating deductible."

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when she was stuck for a word Haddad supplied it. She seemed like a nice, modest girl who was trying hard to please.

We went to a room at the back which was used as a place to hang out between sessions. There were candles burning, and plants, and low, comfortable furniture. Cherie said that she had never been interviewed before, but if she was nervous it added to her charm. I asked her about the feeling she is able to put into a song, adding that Flom had described it as "the thing." Cherie, her eyes bright, responded, "Yes! This is *eet!* It is the thing. That is exactly what it is—it's just this thing." She gestured toward her chest. "I don't know where it comes from, just comes from inside you—the thing."

As we were talking, I could hear Gatica shouting in Spanish as he worked on the word "learn," which sounded particularly Gallic, playing it over and over again, adding what were to me inaudible effects, and shouting some more.

"So now I will sing for you, it's O.K.?" Cherie asked. She stood up and launched into her lucky song—a Jacques Brel belter called "Quand on n'a que l'amour." The money note is the last note in the piece, and Cherie hit it perfectly, arms reaching to embrace her amour. Chills.

Flom arrived, wearing a suit, and hugged his star. They walked back into the control room, where Gatica was at work. The producer played the song. Flom listened with his head inclined downward, rocking with the beat back and forth, his fist cocked, ready to punch the air when he heard the money note.

But the note never came. When the song ended, Flom looked crestfallen. He said he missed some of the simplicity of the earlier demo.

"Right," Gatica said. "I am combing it now. The idea is to keep it fresh—transparent. Today, records are simpler. People will say this sounds like Whitney Houston. Well, it is a ballad. But we have to make it for a new generation."

They played the song again. "We have been very, very careful not to let the accent get in the way," Gatica said.

"Though you can still tell she's French," Flom said.

"You can tell?" the producer said, sounding alarmed.

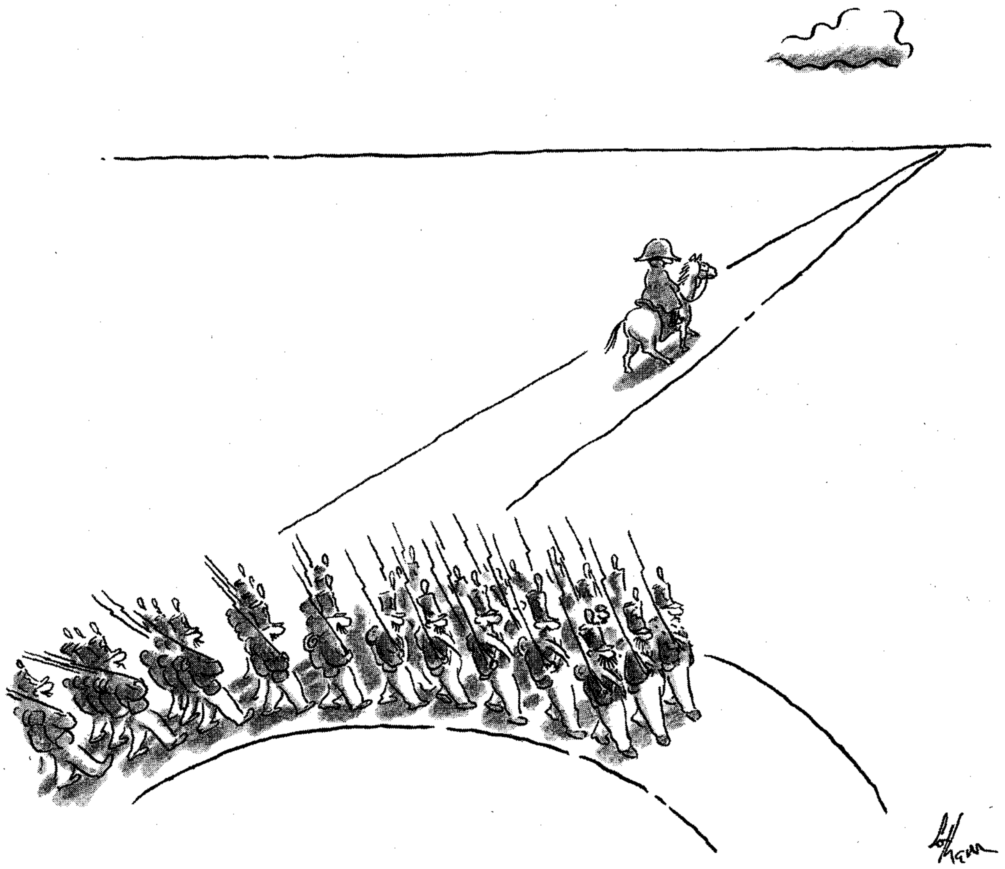
"It's not that that's bad," Flom said. "She's French. Hey—it is a Romance language, after all."

Flom departed and Gatica went back to work. Hours later, when I left, he was still at it.

THE LAST POP STAR

On the subject of whether the record industry will survive, there are optimists and pessimists. The optimists think record companies will eventually figure out how to sell music over the Internet, and when that happens the market for music will be three times bigger than it is now. The pessimists say that the industry has missed a crucial opportunity to control the new distribution platform and that unless the government intervenes the recording industry will disappear, and the music business will return to what it was in the nineteenth century, when publishing and performing were the main sources of revenue. Chris Blackwell thinks the online music business will be a boon to independent labels because manufacturing and distribution costs will be much cheaper; Ahmet Ertegun says, "Yes, but independents still have to get people to buy their records." And, with so much music out there, artists will need more blowing up than ever.

Historically, popular music has been heavily influenced by its format. In the nineteenth century, before Edison invented the phonograph, the music business was a publishing enterprise in which sheet music was the primary commodity. People performed the music themselves, at home, usually on the piano. Songs were made into hits by the popular performers who travelled around the country putting on concerts and musicals. The length of the songs varied. It was a singles business. When recorded music became popular, early in the twentieth century, and the format changed to the shellac 78-r.p.m. disk, popular songs became about three minutes long, which was as much time as a disk could hold. The invention of the LP—the 33-r.p.m. long-playing record—in the late nineteen-forties, created the market for albums. For the record companies, albums cost about the same as singles to produce, but they could be sold for much more. In the CD era, the record industry all but killed off the singles business. MP3s might revive that



business. For artists, this will mean that, instead of making grand artistic statements with an album released once every three or four years, they will focus their talent on individual songs, which they will release every month or so. Moby, the popular recording artist, told me he thought this would be a terrible development for artists, "because an album is so much more interesting artistically than a song." Fans will buy this music in part because it will include goods and services like concert tickets and merchandise. Traditionally, record labels have earned money only from the sale of recorded music, but increasingly record companies may make deals like the one EMI made last year with the British pop star Robbie Williams, in which the label paid the artist some eighty million dollars to become a full partner in all of Williams's earnings—from publishing, touring, and merchandise, as well as from record sales.

As with CDs, MP3s will probably cause a boom in catalogue sales. At the moment, because of traditional retailing constraints, only a small fraction of a label's catalogue is for sale. In an online music store, everything can be offered. Niche markets could become much more important, and artists with small but loyal followings, who are not economically viable in a winner-take-all market, might hold more appeal. Danny Goldberg, a former president of Warner Bros. Records, who is a founder of the independent Artemis Records, told me, "The Internet will be good for Latin music, jazz, world, and anything that sells five to ten thousand." The singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett, who decided to leave the major-label system and put out music on his own label, Mailboat Records, told me that he thinks that more artists will go into the music business for themselves. "At Mailboat, we have three people, and we take care of our customers, and we handle the shows, and everyone has a good time—it's just like the old record business," he said.

Arguably, the most important function that record-industry professionals perform—the task that people like Jason Flom, Jeff Haddad, David Foster, Lyor Cohen, Humberto Gatica, and Paul Moessl are all engaged in, one way or another—is filtering through the millions of aspiring artists who think they can sing or play and finding the one or two who really can. Record men of the future might not need to do A. & R.; they might not even make records. They may prepare monthly playlists of new songs or artists that will be beamed wirelessly to your portable MP3 player. But their essential task—filtering—will remain the same.

Everything depends on getting people to pay for recorded music that they now get for free. When radio threatened the music business in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, the broadcasters agreed to pay a fee to the various rights holders for the music they played, based on an actuarial accounting system. Rights holders' societies like ASCAP administered those payments. Some have argued that a similar system should be adapted to the Internet, but many users would refuse to pay their share, and would go on taking music for free. It may make more sense to address the P2P problem with a government-imposed, statutory license, such as many countries in Europe impose on TV owners. Anyone with an Internet connection would be charged a few dollars a month, regardless of whether he downloaded music or not. That money would be distributed to the rights holders, based on an online sampling system. As Jim Griffin, a former executive at Geffen Records and a digital-rights visionary, explained the concept to me, "You monetize anarchy. Charge them five dollars a month to be thieves."

As the music business shifts online, the hitmakers may give way to people who understand the financial restructuring that's needed. In January, Sir Howard Stringer replaced Tommy Mottola, the head of Sony Music, with Andrew Lack, an executive from NBC with no previous experience in the record industry. The *über* bosses of the record labels aren't even necessarily from the entertainment industry. Universal Vivendi is now run by Jean-René Fourtou, an ex-pharmaceuticals executive; and the head of Bertelsmann is Gunter Thielen, who formerly ran the company's printing and industrial operations. In some ways, the record business of the future sounds more like a public utility than like a music company. It also doesn't sound like as much fun.

In April, Flom decided to postpone Cherie's record. Instead of coming out this summer, it will be released sometime during the first quarter of next year. "It's just taking them a lot longer in the studio than we had anticipated," he told me, and I had a vision of Gatica, the producer, driving himself to distraction with the crunchy loops.

I said that it seemed as though worldwide politics had given the lie to the idea of a "worldwide artist," especially if the artist is French. "They're not going to boycott the fucking album because she's French," Flom replied. Still, it was perhaps not the ideal time to break a worldwide artist named Cherie.

The last time I saw Flom, the numbers for the first quarter of 2003 had just come in, showing that the record industry's downward spiral was continuing. Sales were even lower than those of the first quarter of the disastrous previous year. The top-selling album in the country was a collection of songs sung by Kelly Clarkson, Fox's first "American Idol" winner, who has been discovered and blown up without much help from a record label—television made her a star. (Before too long, the United States' pop charts could begin to resemble Spain's, where seven of the spots on the Top Ten charts were recently occupied by reality-show contestants, causing real recording artists to complain that they aren't getting a fair shake.) And there was talk of a merger between BMG and Warner Music, which could mean that the man who called for the end of Flom's type of "lottery mentality," Rolf Schmidt-Holtz, could be Flom's boss.

Still, on this warm, springlike day, Flom seemed to be in a sunnier mood about the future than he had been when we first met, six months earlier. He had recently signed a new, all-girl country-rock group called Antigone Rising, whom he expected to be huge. And he was happily immersed in looking for the right song that would be the first single for Cherie, confident that sooner or later the perfect up-tempo love song would present itself. Jerry Wexler, one of Ertegun's partners at Atlantic, once said that artist-and-repertoire was just a fancy expression for putting a singer together with a song, and in this respect the record business does not seem to have changed at all.

Flom said he had even thought about trying to write a song for Cherie himself. But this idea hadn't got very far.

"I can't imagine writing a song today," he said. "I don't know where I'd start." ♦

PERSONAL HISTORY

A SUDDEN ILLNESS

How my life changed.

BY LAURA HILLENBRAND

We were in Linc's car, an aging yellow Mercedes sedan, big and steady, with slippery blond seats and a deep, strumming idle. Lincoln called it Dr. Diesel. It was a Sunday night, March 22, 1987, nine-thirty. Rural Ohio was a smooth continuity of silence and darkness, except for a faintly golden seam where land met sky ahead, promising light and people and sound just beyond the tree line.

We were on our way back to Kenyon College after spring break. Linc, my best friend, was driving, his arm easy over the wheel. My boyfriend, Borden, sat behind him. I rode shotgun, a rose from Borden on my lap. Slung over my arm was a nineteen-forties taffeta ball gown I had bought for twenty dollars at a thrift shop. I was nineteen.

The conversation had dropped off. I was making plans for the dress and for my coming junior year abroad at the University of Edinburgh. My eyes strayed along the right shoulder of the road: a white mailbox, the timid glint of an abandoned pickup's tail-light. The pavement racing under the car was gunmetal gray. We were doing fifty or so. A balled-up bag from a drive-through burger joint bumped against my ankle.

A *deer.*

At first, he was only a suggestion of an animal, emerging from the darkness by degrees: a muzzle, a sharp left eye. Then the headlights grasped him.

He was massive, a web of antlers over his head, a heavy barrel, round haunches lifting him from the downward slope of the highway apron. Briefly, his forehooves rested on the line between the shoulder and the highway. I saw his knee bending, the hoof lifting: he was stepping into the car's path.

In the instant that I spent waiting for the deer to roll up over the car's hood and crash through the windshield I was aware of my body warm in the seat, Linc's face lit by the dash, Borden breathing in the back, the cool sulfur glow of the car's interior, the salty smell of the burger bag. I watched the deer's knee and waited for it to straighten. I drew a sharp breath.

The bumper missed the deer's chest by an inch, maybe two. The animal's muzzle passed so close that I could see the swirl of hair around his nostrils. Then he was gone behind us.

I blinked at the road. My eyes caught something else. A brilliant light appeared through the top of the windshield and arced straight ahead of the car at terrific speed. It was a meteor. It burned through the rising light of the horizon and vanished in the black place above the road and below the sky.

My breath escaped in a rush. I turned toward Linc to share my amazement. He was as loose as he had been, his eyes slowly panning the road, his long body unfolding over the seat. I looked back at Borden and could just make out his face. They had seen nothing.

I was about to speak when an intense wave of nausea surged through me. The smell from the bag on the floor was suddenly sickening. I wrapped my arms over my stomach and slid down in my seat. By the time we reached campus, half an hour later, I was doubled over, burning hot, and racked with chills. Borden called the campus paramedics. They hovered in the doorway, pronounced it food poisoning, and left.

I fell asleep sitting up on my bed, leaning against Borden's shoulder. In the morning, my stomach seethed. I walked to the dining hall and sat with Linc, unable to eat. In my history seminar, I drank from a water bottle and tried to concentrate. After class, I walked to my apartment and heated some oatmeal. I swallowed a spoonful; nausea rose in my throat and I pushed the bowl away.

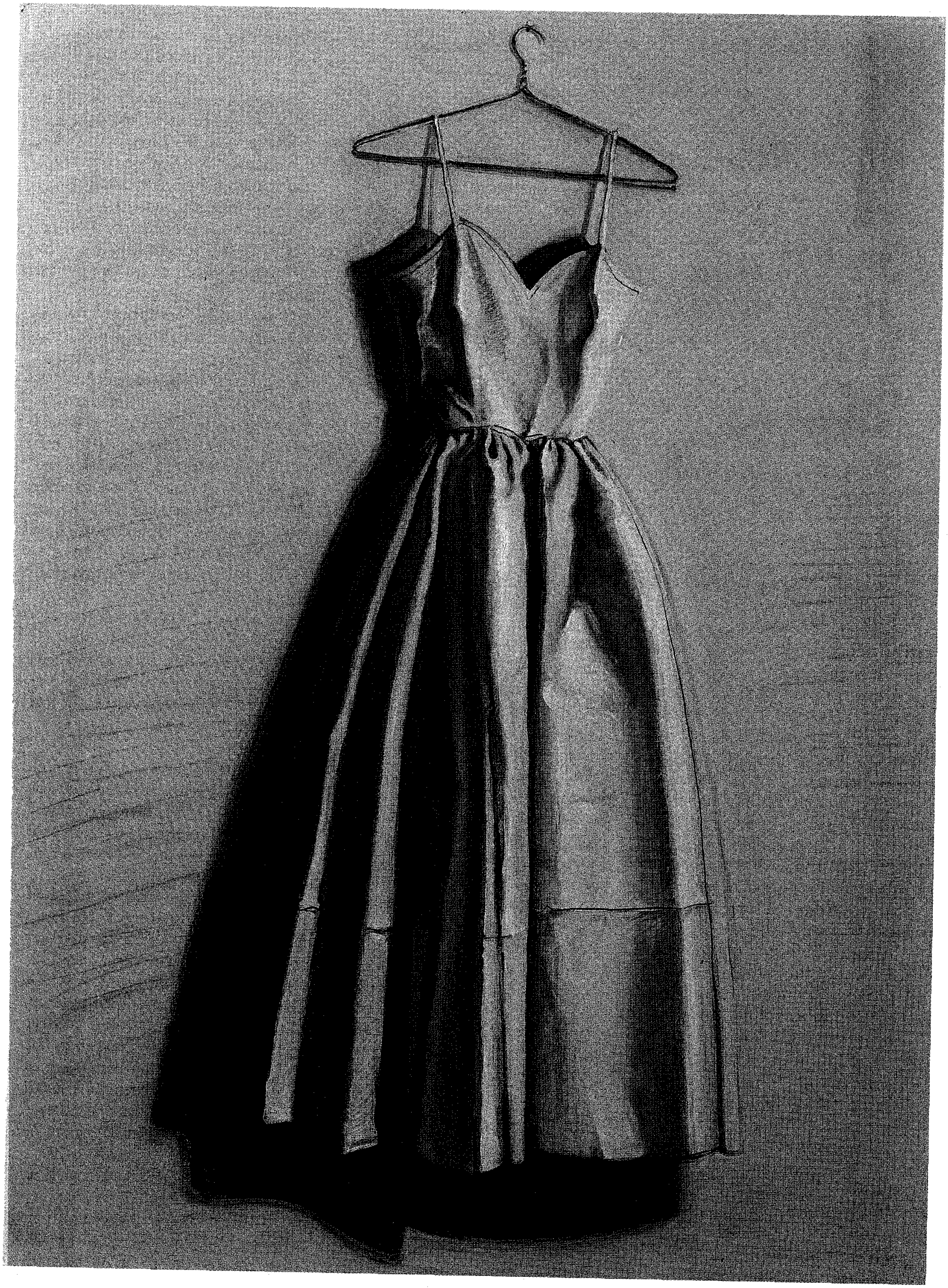
In the next few days, everything I ate made my abdomen balloon. I radiated heat, and my joints and muscles felt bruised. Every day on the way to classes, I struggled a little harder to make it up the hill behind my apartment. Eventually, I began stopping halfway to rest against the trunk of a tree.

One morning, I woke to find my limbs leaden. I tried to sit up but couldn't. I lay in bed, listening to my apartment-mates move through their morning routines. It was two hours before I could stand. On the walk to the bathroom, I had to drag my shoulder along the wall to stay upright. Linc drove me to the campus physician, who ran test after test but couldn't find the cause of my illness. After three weeks of being stranded in my room, I had no choice but to drop out of college. I called my sister and asked if she could drive me home to Maryland.

I sat in the doorway of the apartment while Borden and Linc packed my sister's car. As they pushed the last of my belongings into the back seat, a downpour broke over them. We pulled out, and Kenyon was lost in a falling grayness. I turned to wave to Borden and Linc, but I couldn't see them anymore.

My mother's house was a dignified Colonial that sat back from the road, behind a pine tree that had been mostly denuded by Hurricane Agnes and an anemic cherry tree that would soon collapse onto the den. In the back yard stood a hemlock that had been missing its upper third since my brother and I accidentally set it on fire. Inside, the house was a warren of small rooms that had suited our two-parent, four-kid, two-collie family when my parents bought it, in 1971. My father had walked out in 1977, the elder collie had died three days later, and the house had gradually emptied until my departure for

WAYNE THIEBAUD "YELLOW DRESS" 1974 ©WAYNE THIEBAUD/LICENSED BY VAGA



“Would you like to purchase a videotape of your transaction?”

Kenyon, which had left only my mother and my cat, Fangfoss.

The sun was setting as we pulled up to the back door. I walked upstairs and lay down in my childhood bedroom, which overlooked the back yard and the charred tree. The next morning, I stepped on a scale. I had lost twenty pounds. The lymph nodes on my neck and under my arms and collarbones were painfully swollen. During the day, I rattled with chills, but at night I soaked my clothes in sweat. I felt unsteady, as if the ground were swaying. My throat was inflamed and raw. A walk to the mailbox on the corner left me so tired that I had to lie down.

Sometimes I’d look at words or pictures but see only meaningless shapes. I’d stare at clocks and not understand what the positions of the hands meant. Words from different parts of a page appeared to be grouped together in bizarre sentences: “Endangered Condors Charged in Shotgun Killing.” In conversation, I’d think of one word but say something completely unrelated: “hotel” became “plankton”; “cup” came out “elastic.” I couldn’t hang on to a thought long enough to carry it through a sentence. When I tried to cross the street, the motion of the cars became so disorienting that I couldn’t move. I was at a sensory distance from the world, as if I were wrapped in clear plastic.

I had never been in poor health and didn’t have an internist, so I went to my old pediatrician. I sat in a child’s chair in a waiting room wallpapered with jungle scenes, watching a boy dismember an action figure. When my doctor drew the thermometer from my mouth, he asked me if I knew that my temperature was a hundred and one. He swabbed my throat, left for a few minutes, and returned with the news that I had strep throat. Puzzled by the other symptoms, he prescribed antibiotics and suggested that I see an internist.

The doctor I found waved me into a chair and began asking questions and making notes, pausing to rake his fingers through a hedge of dark hair that drifted onto his brow. He ran some tests and found nothing amiss. He told me to take antacids. A few weeks later, when I returned and told him that I was getting worse, he sat me down. My problem, he said gravely, was not in my body but in my mind; the test results proved it. He told me to see a psychiatrist.

I went to Dr. Charles Troshinsky, a respected psychiatrist whom I had seen when I was fifteen, after my high-school boyfriend had died suddenly. He was shocked at how thin I was. I was just under five feet five, but my weight had dropped to a hundred pounds. Dr. Troshinsky said that he had seen several people with the same constellation of symptoms, all referred by physicians who dismissed them as mentally ill. He wrote my internist a letter stating that he would stake his reputation on his conclusion that I was mentally healthy but suffering from a serious physical illness.

“Find another psychiatrist,” my internist said over the phone, a smile in his voice. How did he explain the fevers, chills, exhaustion, swollen lymph nodes, dizziness? What I was going through, he suggested, was puberty. I had just turned twenty. “Laura, everyone goes through this,” he said with the drizzly slowness one uses with a toddler. “It’s a normal adjustment to adulthood. You’ll grow out of it in a few years.” He told me to come back in six months.

“But I’m not happy with my treatment,” I said.

He laughed. “Well, I am.”

I called his secretary and asked for my medical records. I sat on my bedroom floor and flipped through the doctor’s notes. *Couldn’t handle school,* he had written. *Dropped out.*

My next doctor was a plump, pink man with the indiscriminate gaiety of a golden retriever. He was halfway through a hair transplant, and clumps of hair were lined up in neat rows on his scalp, like spring seedlings.

I again tested positive for strep, and he renewed the antibiotics. He ran a blood test for a virus called Epstein-Barr and found a soaring titer, a measurement of the antibody in my system. I had, he said with pep-rally enthusiasm, something called Epstein-Barr virus syndrome. He had it, too, he said, but he had discovered nutritional-supplement pills that cured it. “Whenever I feel it coming on,” he said, “I just take these.” He talked about how much skiing he could do.

I took the supplements. They had no effect. Nor did the antibiotics; the strep raged on. The doctor changed my prescription repeatedly, to no avail.

At the end of one of my appointments, the doctor followed me into the waiting room and asked my mother to make an appointment so that he could test her for strep. She said she felt fine, but he insisted that she might be infected but asymptomatic.

Our appointments fell on the same day. I went in first and sat while a nurse swabbed my throat. A few minutes later, the doctor bounded in, waving the positive-test swab, and bent over to look at my throat. I'd had strep for nearly three months. I dropped my face into my hands. He straightened abruptly and backed out of the room, repeating that the pills would cure the Epstein-Barr. "I go skiing a lot!" he hollered from down the hall.

I was still crying as I paid the bill. The receptionist gave me a sympathetic smile. She understood how I felt, she said, because she had Epstein-Barr, too. "It's amazing," she said. "The doctor has found that everyone working here has it."

I sat down. Several other patients were sitting near me, and I asked if the doctor had given any of them a diagnosis of Epstein-Barr. Each one said yes. While we were talking, my mother emerged from the doctor's office. He had told her that she, too, had Epstein-Barr.

That year, millions of cicadas boiled up from the ground, teemed over tree limbs, and carpeted lawns and roads. The TV news showed people eating them on skewers. Cicadas burrowed into the house, scaled the curtains, swung from our clothes. I sat in bed, watching them bounce off the windowpane and nosedive into the grass, where they flapped and floundered as if they were drowning. Newton, the Dalmatian puppy my mother had adopted, zigzagged around the yard and snapped them out of the air. We called them flying dog snacks.

My world narrowed down to my bed and my window. I could no longer walk the length of my street. My hair was starting to fall out. I hadn't had a period in four months. My mouth and throat were pocked with dozens of bleeding sores and my temperature was spiking to a hundred and one every twelve hours, attended by a ferocious sweat; in addition to the strep, I now had trench mouth, a rare infection of the gums. Sleeping on my side was uncomfortable because I had little body fat left and my bones pressed into the skin on my hips, knees, and shoulders.

In sleep, I dreamed of vigorous motion. I had swum competitively for ten years, from age seven to seventeen. I had been riding horses since childhood. Smitten with Thoroughbred racing, I had spent my mid-teens learning to ride short-stirrup at a gallop, and praying that I wouldn't grow too tall to become a jockey. At Kenyon, I had been a tennis junkie. Now, as I lost the capacity to move, sports took over my dream world. I won at swimming in the Olympics, out-pedalled the *peloton* in the Tour de France, skimmed over a racetrack on a Kentucky Derby winner. When I woke, I felt the weight of illness on me before I opened my eyes.

Most of the people around me stepped backward. Linc said my friends asked him how I was, but after one or two get-well cards I stopped hearing from them. Now and then, I called people I had known in high school. The conversations were awkward and halting, and I felt foolish. No one knew what to say. Everyone had heard rumors that I was sick. Someone had heard I had AIDS. Another heard I was pregnant.

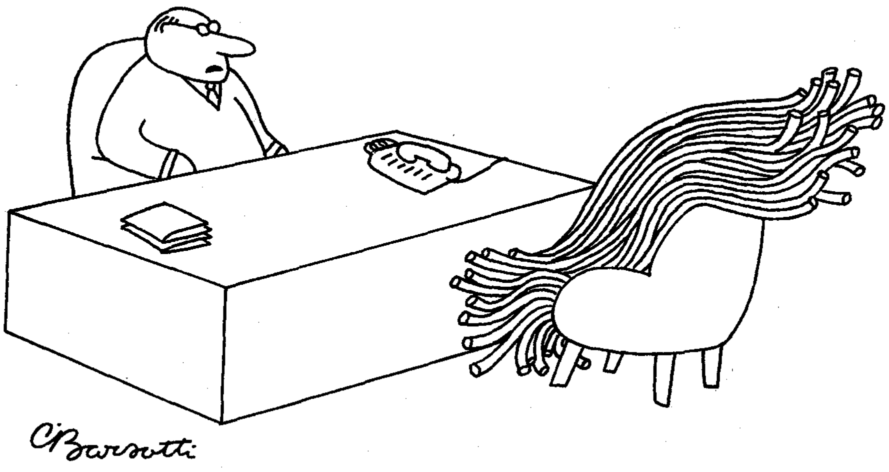
I missed Borden. At Kenyon, I had often studied in a deli run by a groovy guy named Craig, who cruised around the place in fluorescent-yellow sunglasses. It was there, in September of 1986, that Borden had first smiled at me. He was a senior, with a gentle, handsome face and wavy black hair. He had torn up his knee running track, and to avoid walking he used a battered bike to get around campus. The bike had no chain, so he could really ride it only downhill, wiggling it to keep it going when the ground levelled out. On the uphills, he stabbed at the ground with his good leg, Fred Flintstone style. Eventually, some frat brothers kidnapped the bike and hung it from a tree over the Scrotum Pole, a stone marker that had earned its nickname during a legendary fraternity vaulting incident.

From the day we met in the deli, Borden and I had been inseparable. Since I left Kenyon, he had sent me off-color postcards and silly drawings, mailed between papers and finals and graduation. I wrote dirty limericks and mailed them back to him.

That summer, he showed up at my door. He got a job as an assistant editor at a foreign-policy quarterly, moved in with me and my mother, and took care of me, making plans for the things we'd do when I got better.

Of my friends, only Linc visited. Home for the summer in Chicago, he drove Dr. Diesel fifteen hours to my house, where he would sit in a dilapidated denim armchair at the foot of my bed. The seat on the chair had collapsed, but he sat there anyway, his long thighs pointing up at the ceiling. Each time he saw me after a long absence, a wide startled look would pass over his face. He once said that he could sense the disease on me. I knew what he meant. I was disappearing inside it.

I saw my next physician only once. My jeans slid down my hips as I walked into the exam room, and he watched me tug them up. He asked how often I weighed myself. Often, I replied. You



"Throw in some marinara sauce and you've got a deal."

shouldn't weigh yourself, he said, and you have to eat. I'm not dieting, I replied. Girls shouldn't be so thin, he said. I know, I *don't want to* be this thin. Yes, yes, but girls *shouldn't* be so thin.

After the appointment, I went to the bathroom, and as I opened the door to leave the doctor nearly fell into me. I was halfway home when I realized that he had been trying to hear if I was vomiting.

The next doctor was a pretty, compact woman with a squirrelly brightness. She found that I still had strep and changed the antibiotics. She ran the same tests that everyone else had run, and, again, the results were normal. I fought off the strep, but the other symptoms remained. I kept returning to see this doctor, hoping she could find some way to make me feel better. She couldn't, and I could see that it was wearing on her.

In September, I was so weak that on a ride over to her office I had to drop my head to my knees to avoid passing out. When the nurse entered, I was lying down, holding my head, the room swimming around me. She took my blood pressure: 70/50. The doctor came in. She wouldn't look at me.

"I don't know why you keep coming here," she said, her lips tight.

I told her that I felt faint and asked about my blood pressure. She said that it was normal and left, saying nothing else. She then went to see my mother, who was in the waiting room. "When is she going to realize that her problems are all in her head?" the doctor said.

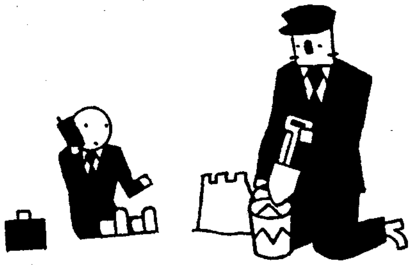
I returned home, lay down, and tried to figure out what to do. My psychiatrist had found me to be mentally healthy, but my physicians had concluded that if my symptoms and the results of a few conventional tests didn't fit a disease they knew of, my problem *had* to be psychological. Rather than admit that they didn't know what I had, they made a diagnosis they weren't qualified to make.

Without my physicians' support, it was almost impossible to find support from others. People told me I was lazy and selfish. Someone lamented how unfortunate Borden was to have a girlfriend who demanded coddling. Some of Borden's friends suggested that he was foolish and weak to stand by me. "The best thing my parents ever did for my deadbeat brother," a former professor of his told him, "was to throw him out." I was ashamed and angry and indescribably lonely.

THE RALLY

There was some kind of rally going on in the common. Somebody was speaking into a bullhorn to about three hundred people, who were cheering and shouting things. I decided to drift over and check it out. The speaker was saying, "Even my three-year-old son knows better than to kick a goat." I mingled with the crowd. A woman yelled, "You got a great big cherry pie on your head!" And a dozen others said, "Yes, you do." The man continued, "And then the dog ate our sofa. Did we kick it? No, we didn't." Someone shouted, "The saints dropped the ball on that one." The man said, "I been down there where even the little birdies fear to roam. I once found an angry viper in my pocket, but I steered the course. I bonged myself with a hidden cloud." "And you never lost your way," many shrieked. I was working my way toward the front. The excitement was catching. "If you spit in a burning skillet, sure, it sizzles, and then it's gone, and what have you got? You have the memory of the sizzle, but soon that, too, is gone, and you're poorer than you were before," he said. "Your duck just sat on a firecracker," I cheered. The speaker stopped and tried to locate

For seven months I had remained hopeful that I would find a way out of my illness, but the relentless decline of my body, my isolation, and the dismissal and derision I was experiencing took their toll. In the fall of 1987, I sank into a profound depression. I stopped seeing my physician and didn't try to find a new one. One afternoon, I dug through my mother's drawer and found a bottle of Valium that had been prescribed for back spasms. I poured the pills onto the bed and fingered them for an hour, pushing them into lines along the patterns on the quilt. I thought about Borden and couldn't put the pills in my mouth.



I went back to Dr. Troshinsky. He told me to make an appointment with Dr. John G. Bartlett, the chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Bartlett was the foremost authority in his field, Dr. Troshinsky said. If there was an answer, he would have it.

At Johns Hopkins, after a lengthy exam and review of my records, Dr. Bartlett sat down with Borden and me. My internists, he said, were wrong. My disease was real.

"You have chronic fatigue syndrome," he said. He explained that it was one of the most frustrating illnesses he had encountered in his practice; presented with severely incapacitated patients, he could do very little to help them. He suspected that it was viral in origin, although he believed that the Epstein-Barr virus was not involved; early lab tests had linked the virus to C.F.S., but subsequent research had demonstrated that some patients had had no exposure to the virus. He could offer no treatment. Eventually, he said, some patients recovered on their own.

"Some don't?"

"Some don't."

That night, for the first time since

the man who had spoken those words. The crowd, too,
was looking around. I acted as though I were looking
also. After a considerable pause, he continued, "Never
before have we witnessed hairy hands with long fingernails
curl around the puffballs of history with such miraculous
dexterity." The people went crazy. They started bumping
one another's foreheads. I was bumping, and getting
bumped. "It was no accident I swallowed an ant this
morning while preparing my remarks for this rally. I
wanted to swallow that ant," he said. People had stopped
bumping, and now many of them were wiping away tears.
I had to admit, he was a powerful speaker. "And now we
are on the verge of setting sail the little headache and
the big headache, too, and we can see the fireflies, who
had all but forgotten us, beating their wings like idiot
children coming back from a dull day in the park, and
it is beautiful, can't you see just how marvellous it is?"
he said. "We love the idiot children," someone shouted.
"Fireflies can't drive tractors," another yelled. "What
happened to the pig?" I said. The man next to me looked
disgusted. "There is no pig," he said.

—*James Tate*

March, I didn't dream of being an athlete. I dreamed of being ill. In my dreams, I was never healthy again.

In the ensuing months, I began to improve. I hitched Newton to a leash and she tugged me through the neighborhood, first one block, then two, then three. My feet, soft from months in bed, blistered. The fever remained, but I was less prone to chills.

In the fall of 1988, Borden began graduate studies in political philosophy at the University of Chicago, and I felt well enough to move there with him. From the airport, we took a cab to Hyde Park, where Borden had rented a one-room apartment. The front door appeared to have been crowbarred for criminal purposes at least once. Inside, there was a mattress splayed across plastic milk crates and a three-legged dresser propped up on a brick. Roaches skittered over the walls and across the floor. The bathtub was heaped with used kitty litter. A weeks-old hamburger sat on the stove, shrunken into a shape that resembled the head of a mummy. The roaches were in various attitudes of repose around it.

We gave the mummy head a proper burial, roachproofed our toothbrushes by storing them in the refrigerator, and tried to make ends meet on Borden's nine-thousand-dollar-a-year stipend and our savings. The apartment was four flights up, with no elevator, so most days I spent my time inside, reading about the French Revolution and listening to our neighbor throw things at her husband.

I wanted to be useful, but I wasn't strong enough for a conventional job. The one thing I could still do, however, was write. Shortly after arriving in Chicago, while watching a video of the 1988 Kentucky Derby, I had an idea for an article on the impact of overcrowded fields on the race. I researched and wrote the piece, then mailed it to an obscure racing magazine. I got a job offer: fifty dollars per story, no benefits. I took only assignments that I could do from home and wrote them in bed. The magazine never paid me, but my bylines drew assignments at better publications, ultimately earning me regular work covering equine medicine and horse-industry issues at *Equus*.

I was growing much stronger, but whenever I overextended myself my health disintegrated. One mistake could land me in bed for weeks, so the potential cost of even the most trivial activities, from showering to walking to the mailbox, had to be painstakingly considered. Sometimes I relapsed for no reason at all. Living in perpetual fear of collapse was stressful, but on my good days I was functioning much better. By 1990, I could walk all over Hyde Park, navigate the stairs of the apartment with ease, and, for half an hour on one blissful afternoon, ride a horse. Three years after becoming ill, I wrote to Linc about the curious sensation of growing younger.

In the summer of 1991, while visiting my mother during Borden's summer break, he and I decided to drive to New York to see the racetrack at Saratoga. A ten-hour road trip was risky, but I had grown tired of living so confined a life.

As we set out, the skies darkened. By the time we reached the interstate, a ferocious thunderstorm was crashing around us. Rain and hail hammered the roof of the car and gusts of wind buffeted us across the lane. We were caught in speeding traffic, but because the sheets of rain sweeping down the windshield limited visibility to a blurry tinge of lights ahead and behind, we couldn't slow down or pull over. It was more than an hour before we were able to escape into a rest stop. I sat on the floor of the bathroom, looking out a high window and watching the trees sway. The rain tapered off. My hands were shaking.

We had planned to stop at the New Jersey farmhouse where our friends Bill and Sarah were staying, but we were very late. Borden called them on a pay phone while I waited in the car, watching him through the beads of rain on the windshield. He climbed back in, and we sat with the engine idling. I was frightened by the draining sensation in my body.

Should we turn around? I asked. Borden's brow furrowed. Sometimes you've gotten a second wind, he said gently, as if asking a question. I wanted to believe him, so I agreed. He put the car in gear and we drove in silence. I felt worse and worse. I think we should turn around, I said, struggling to push the words out. We're closer to Bill's than we are to home, he said. If we keep going, you can rest sooner. He was scared now, leaning forward, driving fast. We entered New Jersey. We have to turn around, I said. Please. My head was pressed against the window, and I was crying. We're almost there, he said. We turned into the farmhouse driveway. There were rows of melons in the field.

Bill took us to a guest room. Borden turned on the TV and left me to rest. By the time he returned to check on me, I was sweating profusely and chills were running over me in waves. He took my hand and was horrified: it was gray and cold, and the veins had vanished.

He spread blankets over me and tried to help me drink a glass of milk. I couldn't sit up, so he cupped my head in his hand and tipped the milk into my mouth sideways. It ran down my cheek and pooled on the pillow. My teeth chattered so much that I couldn't speak. Borden called an emergency room. The nurse thought that I was in shock and urged him to rush me in. But we were far from the hospital, and doctors had never been able to help. I was sure that being moved would kill me.

Borden lay down and held me. Wide awake, I slid into delirium. I was in a vast desert, looking down at a dead Indian. His body was desiccated and hardened, his skin shiny and black and taut over his sinews, his arms bent upward, hands grasping, clawlike. His shrivelled tongue was thrust into an empty eye socket. I lay there and trembled, whispering *I love you, I love you, I love you* to Borden through clenched teeth. *I'm sorry*, he said.

Hours passed. The sun rose over the melon field.

Borden drove me back to my mother's house. I lay exhausted for three days. When I opened my eyes on the morning of the fourth day, I had a black feeling. I couldn't get up.

For as long as two months at a time, I couldn't get down the stairs. Bathing became nearly impossible. Once a week or so, I sat on the edge of the tub and rubbed a washcloth over myself. The smallest exertion plunged me into a "crash." First, my legs would weaken and I'd lose the strength to stand. Then I wouldn't be able to sit up. My arms would go next, and I'd be unable to lift them. I couldn't roll over. Soon, I would lose the strength to speak. Only my eyes were capable of movement. At the bottom of each breath, I would wonder if I'd be able to draw the next one.

The corpse of the Indian hung in my mind. Borden and I never spoke of it, or of the events of that night, and we never spoke of the future. To corral my thoughts, he made lists with me: candybars from A to Z, Kentucky Derby winners, Vice-Presidents in backward order, N.F.L. quarterbacks, Union Army commanders. Over and over, I asked him if I was going to survive. He always answered yes.

Late one night, as I walked down the hall, I heard a soft, low sound and looked down the stairway. I saw Borden, pacing the foyer and sobbing. I started to call to him, then stopped myself, realizing that he wished to be alone. The next morning, he was as cheerful and steady as ever. But sometimes when I looked out the window I'd see him walking around the yard in endless revolutions, head down, hands on his temples.

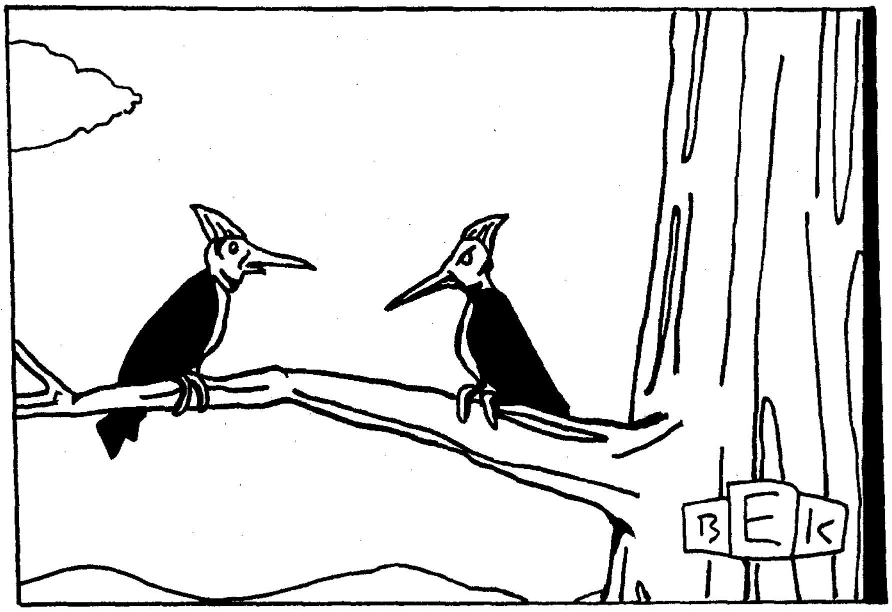
One afternoon in September, he came in, sat on my bed, and told me that classes were starting and he had to return to Chicago. Before he left, he gave me a silver ring engraved with the words "*Vous et nul autre.*" I slid it on my finger and pressed my face to his chest.

With Borden in Chicago and my mother at work, I needed assistance to get through the day. I went through several helpers hired from nanny services. The first one clattered in with stacks of crimson-beaded Moroccan shoes and harem pants. She dumped them on my bed. "Twenty for the shoes, thirty for the pants," she said. She prowled through the house, appraising the furniture. "How much do you want for your refrigerator?" she asked.

When I asked the woman who followed to take Newton into the back yard, she opened the front door and shooed the dog onto the street. Lying in bed upstairs, I heard the dog barking gleefully as she galloped westward. I called to the woman but got no response. I sat up and looked out the window. The woman was standing high in our apple tree, mouth open, gaping at the vacant sky. The dog returned; the woman did not.

The third helper sympathized and commiserated, then bustled around downstairs while I lay upstairs in bed. It wasn't until she abruptly vanished that I discovered she had been packing armloads of my belongings into her car each evening. I went to the closet and found only a hanger where my taffeta ball gown had been.

On a rainy afternoon in January of 1993, I was sitting on the bed reading a magazine when the room began whirling violently. I dropped the magazine and grabbed on to the dresser. I felt as though I were rolling and lurching, a ship on the high seas. I clung to the dresser and waited for the feeling to pass,



"You might want to save some of this rage for your woodpecking."

but it didn't. At five the next morning, I woke with a screeching, metal-on-metal sound in my ears. My eyes were jerking to the left, and I couldn't stop them. My eyes, upper lip, and cheeks were markedly swollen.

I went to a neurologist for tests. A technician asked me to lie down on a table. He produced something that looked like a blowtorch and pushed it into my ear. A jet of hot air roared out, spinning the vestibular fluid in my inner ear. It triggered such a forceful sensation of spinning that I gripped the table with all my strength, certain that I was about to fly off and slam into the wall. The tests determined that my vertigo was neurological in origin and virtually untreatable. The doctor prescribed diuretics and an extremely low-sodium diet to control the facial edema, which seemed to be linked to the vertigo. He could do little else.

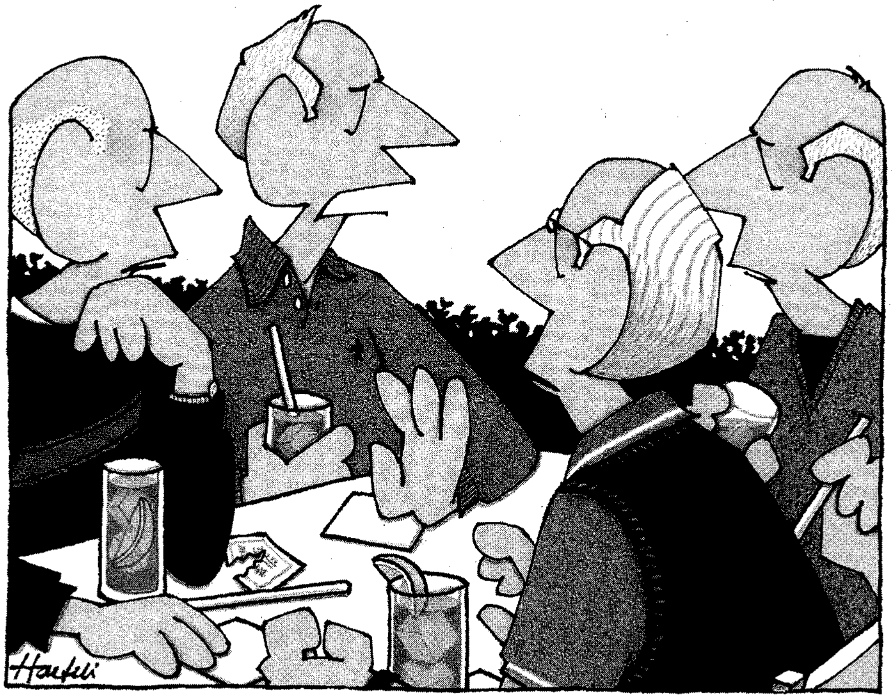
The vertigo wouldn't stop. I didn't lie on my bed so much as ride it as it swung and spun. There was a constant shrieking sound in my ears. The furniture flexed and skidded around the room, and the walls folded and unfolded. Every few days there was a sudden plunging sensation, and I would throw my arms out to catch myself. The leftward eye-rolling came and went. Sleep brought no respite; every dream took place on the deck of a tossing ship, a runaway rollercoaster, a plane caught in violent turbulence, a falling elevator. Looking at anything close-up left me reeling. I couldn't read or write. I rented audiobooks, but I couldn't follow the narratives.

Borden called several times a day. He told me about Xenophon and Thucydides, the wind off Lake Michigan, the athletic feats of the roaches. When I asked him about himself, he changed the subject.

On Valentine's Day, a package from Borden arrived in the mail. Inside was a gold pocket watch. I hung it from my window frame and stared at it as the room bent and arced around it. Weeks passed, and then months. The watch dial meted out each day, the light sliding across it: reddish in the morning, hard and colorless at midday, red again at dusk. In the dark, I could hear it ticking.

Outside, the world went on. Linc got married, my siblings had children, my friends got graduate degrees and jobs and mortgages. None of it had any relation to me. The realm of possibility began and ended in that room, on that bed. I no longer imagined anything else. If I was asked what month it was, I had to think for a while before I could answer.

While I was lying there, I began to believe that we had struck the deer back in 1987, that he had come through the windshield and killed me, and that this was Hell.



"The senior moments don't freak me out as much as the 'Death in Venice' moments."

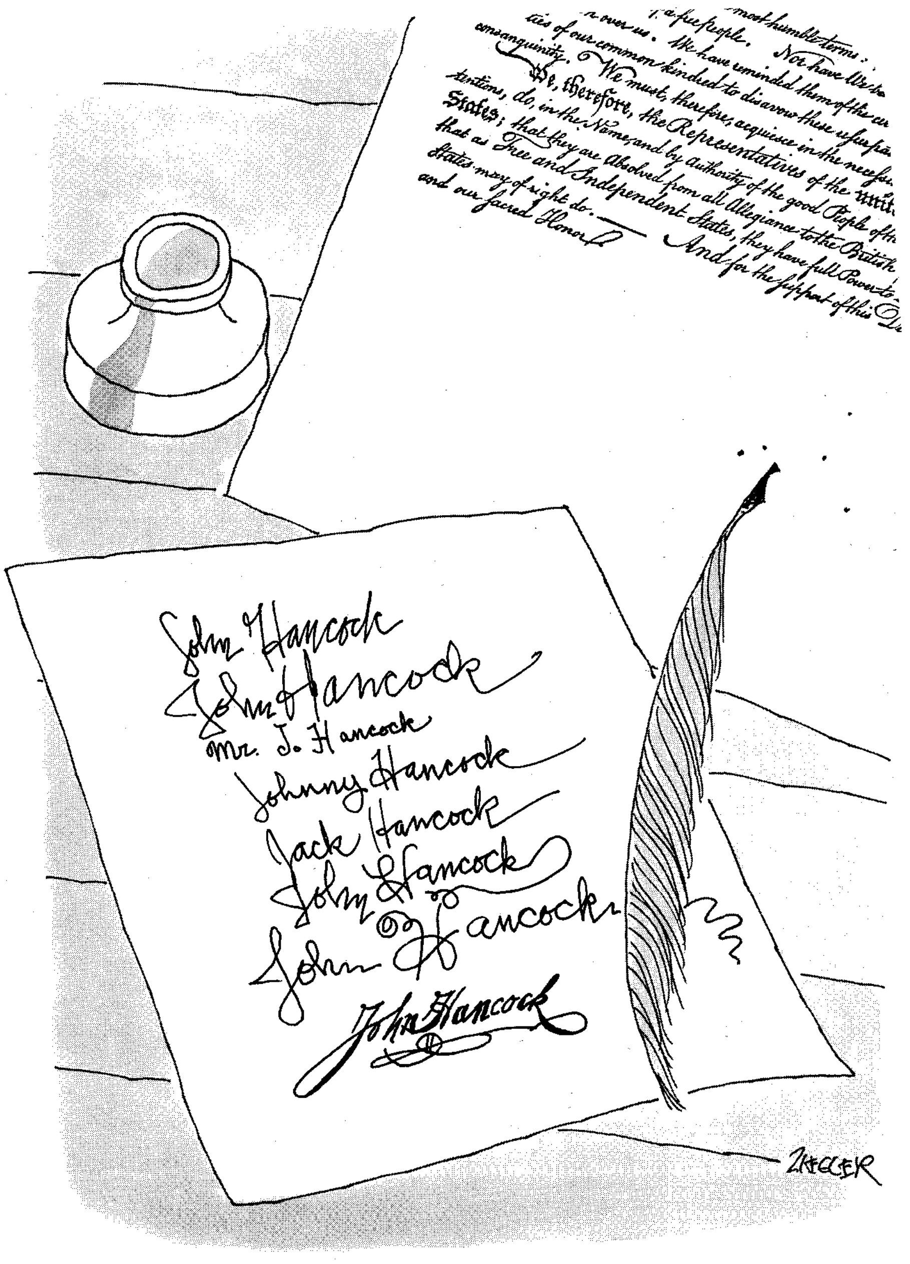
• •

Two years passed. In late 1994, Borden took his qualifying exams, and left Chicago. When I first saw him, lugging his green backpack, he was so thin that I gasped.

In 1995, by tiny increments, the vertigo began to abate. Eventually, I could read the back of a cornflakes box. My strength began to return. Instead of sitting on the edge of the tub with a washcloth, I could sit on the shower floor while the water ran over me. The first time I showered, dead skin peeled off in sheets. A hair stylist came and cut off eight inches of my hair, which had been growing like kudzu for several years and was now nearing my waist. In time, I could walk down the stairs almost every day. I sat on the patio looking at the trees.

Since my visit to Johns Hopkins, I had searched for an internist I could trust. In 1988, C.F.S. had been officially recognized and described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Subsequent research suggested endocrinologic, immunologic, and neurological abnormalities in many C.F.S. patients, though the causes remained elusive. Physicians were becoming aware of the disease, but many of them knew less about it than I did. Others hawked dubious treatments. For a while, I tried almost anything. A few treatments caused disastrous side effects. The rest did nothing.

Then a friend referred me to Dr. Fred Gill, a renowned infectious-disease specialist. He was an angular, elegant man with a neat, Amish-style beard rimming a sharp jawline. As Borden and I told him my story, I found my stomach tightening in anticipation of a dismissive verdict. But Dr. Gill listened for the better part of an hour. When we had finished, he nodded. He couldn't cure me, he said, but he would do everything he could to help me cope with the illness. In the fol-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John Hancock
John Hancock
Mr. J. Hancock
Johnny Hancock
Jack Hancock
John Hancock
John Hancock
John Hancock
ZIEGLER

• •

lowing years, Dr. Gill managed my symptoms and coördinated my care with other specialists.

Eager to be productive, I called my *Equus* editor, Laurie Prinz, and asked if I could write something. She assigned a story on equine surgery and told me not to worry about a deadline. I did the interviews on the phone from bed. Because looking at the page made the room shimmy crazily around me, I could write only a paragraph or two a day. When I could no longer stand the spinning, I'd take a pillow into the yard and lie in the grass with Newton, fixing my eyes on the treetops while she dissected a bone. It took me six weeks to write fifteen hundred words, but, four years after the abortive trip to Saratoga, I was coming back.

In 1996, with Borden and Fangfoss the cat, I moved into a small apartment in northwest Washington, D.C. One block away stood a fire station, and if Washington has an arson district we were in the heart of it. At the Taiwanese consulate, which was next door, a group of protesters soon set up camp, hauled in a loudspeaker and blasted a Chinese rallying song, sung by shrieky children. They apparently had a loop tape, so the song never ended. It was like listening to a bone saw. After a few weeks, I started dreaming to it.

I turned up my radio and wrote as much as I could, mostly equine veterinary medical articles for *Equus*. On breaks, I took brief walks. I bought new shoes—I'd been lying around in socks for years—and discovered that my feet had shrunk two sizes. I had lived for so long in silence and isolation that the world was a sensory explosion. At the grocery store, I dragged my hands along the shelves, touching boxes and bags, smelling oranges and pears and apples. At the hardware store, I'd plunge my arm into the seed bins to feel the pleasing weight of the grain against my skin. I was a toddler again.

After years of seeing people almost exclusively on television, I found their three-dimensionality startling: the light playing off their faces, the complexity of their hands, the strange electric feel of their nearness. One afternoon, I spent fifteen minutes watching a shirtless man clip a hedge, enthralled by the glide of the muscles under his skin.

On a cool fall day in 1996, I was sifting through some documents on the great racehorse Seabiscuit when I discovered Red Pollard, the horse's jockey. I saw him first in a photograph, curled over Seabiscuit's neck. Looking out at me from the summer of 1938, he had wistful eyes and a face as rough as walnut bark.

I began looking into his life and found a story to go with the face. Born in 1909, Red was an exceptionally intelligent, bookish child with a shock of orange hair. At fifteen, he was abandoned by his guardian at a makeshift racetrack cut through a Montana hayfield. He wanted to be a jockey, but he was too tall and too powerfully built. That didn't stop him, though. He began race riding in the bush leagues and fared so badly that he took to part-time prizefighting in order to survive. He lived in horse stalls for twelve years, studying Emerson and the "Rubáiyát," piloting neurotic horses at "leaky roof" tracks, getting punched bloody in cow-town clubs, keeping painfully thin with near-starvation diets, and probably pills containing the eggs of tapeworms.

He was appallingly accident prone. Racehorses blinded his right eye, somersaulted onto his chest at forty miles per hour, trampled him, and rammed him into the corner of a barn, virtually severing his lower leg. He shattered his teeth and fractured his back, hip, legs, collarbone, shoulder, ribs. He was once so badly mauled that the newspapers announced his death. But he came back every time, struggling through pain and fear and the limitations of his body to do the only thing he had ever wanted to do. And in the one lucky moment of his unlucky life he found Seabiscuit, a horse as damaged and persistent as he was. I hung Red's picture above my desk and began to write.

What began as an article for *American Heritage* became an obsession, and in the next two years the obsession became a book. Borden and I moved to a cheap rental house farther downtown, and I arranged my life around the project. At the local library, I pored over documents and microfilm I requisitioned from the Library of Congress. If I looked down at my work, the room spun, so I perched my laptop on a stack of books in my office, and Borden jerry-rigged a device that held documents vertically. When I was too tired to sit at my desk, I set the laptop up on my bed. When I was too dizzy to read, I lay down and wrote with my eyes closed. Living in my subjects' bodies, I forgot about my own.

I mailed the manuscript off to Random House in September, 2000, then fell into bed. I was lying there the following day when the room began to gyrate. Reviewing the galleys brought me close to vomiting several times a day. Most of the gains I had made since 1995 were lost. I spent each afternoon sitting with Fangfoss on my back steps, watching the world undulate and sliding into despair.

In March of 2001, Random House released "Seabiscuit: An American Legend." Five days later, I was lying down, when the phone rang. "You are a best-selling writer," my editor said. I screamed. Two weeks later, I picked up the phone to hear him and my agent shout in tandem, "You're No. 1!" Borden threw a window open and yelled it to the neighborhood.

That spring, as I tried to cope with the dreamy unreality of success and the continuing failure of my health, something began to change in Borden. At meals, he sat in silence, his gaze disconnected, his jaw muscles working. His sentences trailed off in the middle. He couldn't sleep or eat. He was falling away from me, and I didn't know why.

He came into my office one night in June, sat down, and slid his chair up to me, touching his knees to mine. I looked at his face. He was still young and handsome, his hair black, his skin seamless. But the color was gone from his lips, the quickness from his eyes. He tried to smile, but the corners of his mouth wavered. He dropped his chin to his chest.

He began to speak, and fourteen years of unvoiced emotions spilled out: the torment of watching the woman he loved suffer; his feelings of responsibility and helplessness and anger; his longing for children we probably couldn't have; the endless strain of living in obedience to an extraordinarily volatile disease.

We talked for much of the night. I found myself revealing all the grief that I had hidden from him. When I asked him why he hadn't said anything before, he said he thought I would shatter. I realized that I had feared the same of him. In protecting each other from the awful repercussions of our misfortune, we had become strangers.

When we were too tired to talk anymore, I went into the bedroom and sat down alone. I slid his ring from my finger and dropped it into a drawer.

We spent a long, painful summer talking, and for both of us there were surprises. I didn't shatter, and neither did he. I prepared myself for him to leave, but he didn't. We became, for the first time since our days at Kenyon, alive with each other.

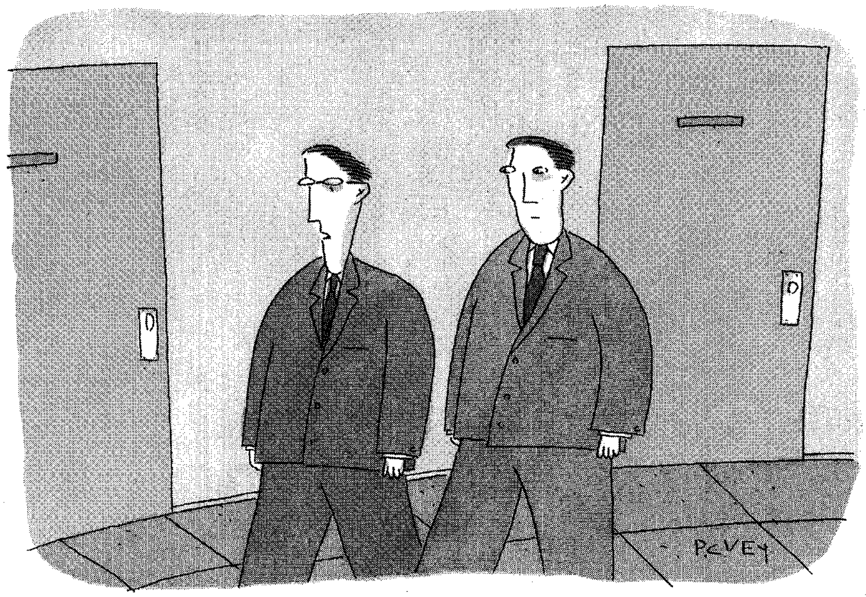
One night that fall, I walked to the back of the yard. As Fangfoss hunted imaginary mice in the grass, I looked out at the hill behind the house. Beyond it, downtown Washington hummed like an idling engine, the city lights radiating over the ridge. I looked west, where a line of row-house chimneys filed down the hill until they became indistinguishable from the trunks of the walnut trees at the road's end. Borden came out and joined me briefly, draping his arms over my shoulders, then he went inside. I watched the screen door slap behind him.

As I turned back, I saw a slit of light arc over the houses and vanish behind the trees. It was the first meteor I had seen since that night in Linc's car. I thought, for the first time in a long time, of the deer.

In the depths of illness, I believed that the deer had crashed through the windshield and ushered me into an existence in which the only possibility was suffering. I was haunted by his form in front of the car, his bent knee, the seeming inevitability of catastrophe, and the ruin my life became.

I had forgotten the critical moment. The deer's knee didn't straighten. He didn't step into our path, we didn't strike him, and I didn't die. As sure as I was that he had taken everything from me, I was wrong.

The car passed him and moved on. ♦

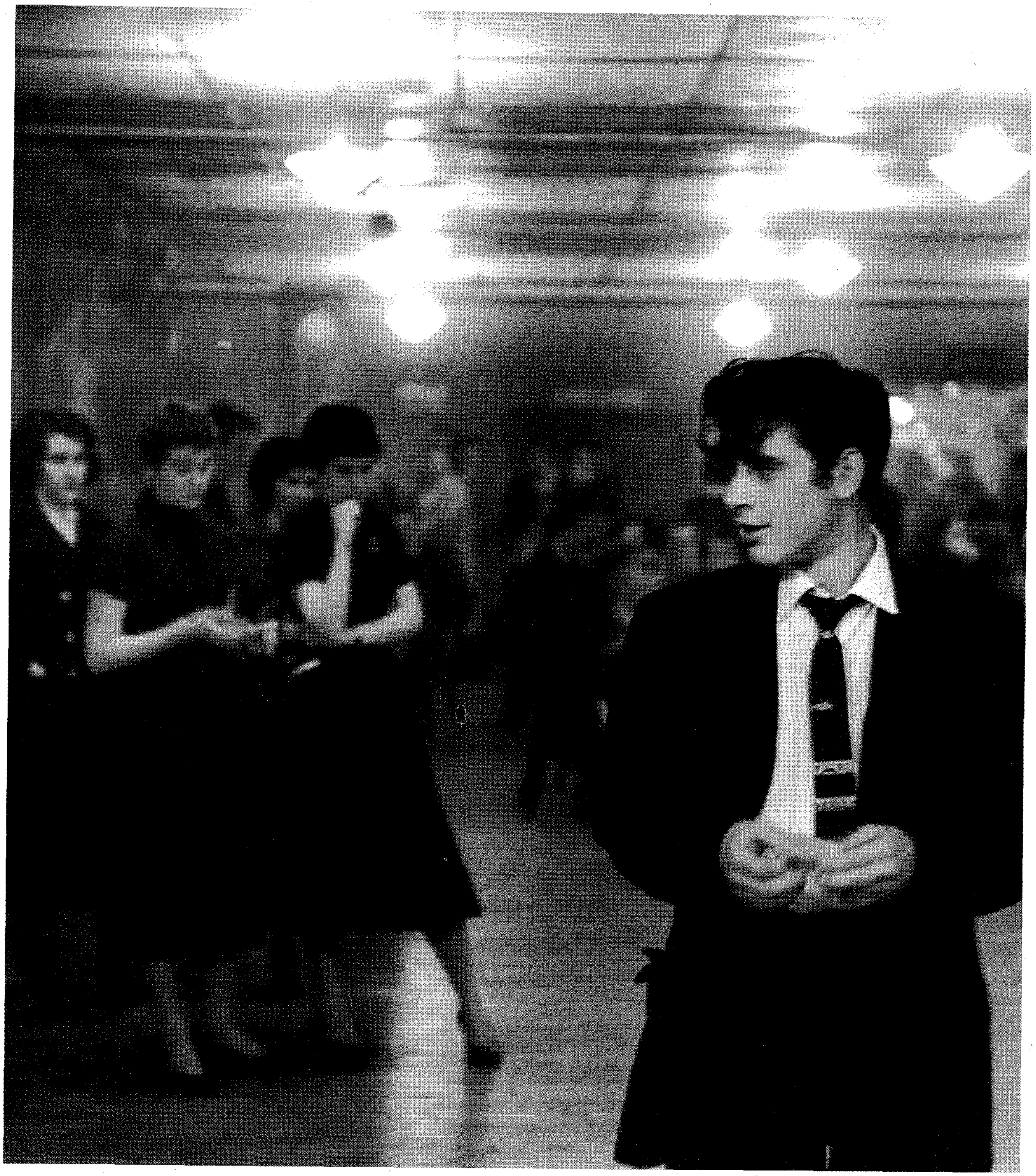


"Did you hear that Henderson ascended to Heaven amid the entire angelic assembly? You can't buy publicity like that."

FICTION

THE WALK WITH ELIZANNE

BY JOHN UPDIKE



Their class had graduated from Olinger High School in 1952, just before the name was regionalized out of existence. Though the year 2002 inevitably figured in yearbook predictions and jokes, nobody had really believed that this much future would ever become the present. They were seventeen and eighteen; 2002 was impossibly remote. Now it was here, here in the function room of Fiorvante's, a restaurant in West Alton, half a mile from the stately county hospital where a lot of them had been born and now one of them lay critically ill.

David Kern and his second wife, Andrea, long enough his wife to be no stranger to these five-year reunions, went to visit the sick class member, Mamie Kauffman, in the hospital room where she had lain for six weeks, her bones too riddled with cancer for her to walk. She had been living alone in a house she and a long-decamped husband had bought forty years ago, and where three children had been raised on a second-grade teacher's salary. Get-well cards and art work from generations of her pupils filled the room's sills and walls; Mamie was bubbly and hospitable, though she could not rise into even a sitting position.

"What an outpouring of love this has brought on," she told them. "I was feeling sorry for myself and, I guess you'd have to say, not enough loved, until this happened." She described getting out of bed and feeling her hip snap, feeling herself tossed into a corner like a rag doll, and reaching for the telephone, which luckily was on the floor, with her cane. She had used a cane for some time, for what she had thought was rheumatoid arthritis. At first she meant to call her daughter, Dorothy, two towns away. "I was so mad at myself, I couldn't think of Dot's phone number, though I dial it every other day, and then I told myself, 'Mamie, it's two-thirty in the morning, you don't want Dot's number, what you want is nine-one-one. What you want is an ambulance.' They came in ten minutes and couldn't have been nicer. One of the paramedics it turned out had been a second grader of mine twenty years ago."

Andrea smiled and said, "That's lovely." In this overdecorated sickroom she looked young, vigorous, efficient, gracious; David was proud of her. She was a captive from another tribe, from a state other than Pennsylvania.

Mamie tried to tell them about her suffering. "At times I've felt a little impatient with the Lord, but then I'm ashamed of myself. He doesn't give you more than He gives you strength to bear."

In theistic Pennsylvania, David realized, people developed philosophies. Where he lived now, an unresisted atheism left people to suffer with the mute, recessive stoicism of animals. The more intelligent they were, the less they had to say in extremis.

Mamie went on, "I've been rereading Shirley MacLaine, where she says that life is like a book, and your job is to figure out what chapter you're in. If this is my last chapter, I have to read it that way, but you know I've had a lot of time to think lying here and—" In her broad, kind face, nearly as pale as her pillow, Mamie's watery blue eyes faltered, becoming quick and dry. "I don't think it is," she finished bravely. Even flat on her back, she was a teacher, knowing more than her audience and out of lifelong habit wanting to impart the lesson. "I'm not afraid of death," she told the visiting couple, smartly dressed in their reunion finery. "It's locked into my heart that—that—"

Yes, what? David thought, anxious to hear, though aware of the time ticking away. He came to this area so rarely now that he sometimes got lost on the new roads, even travelling only a mile. The reunion wouldn't wait.

"That I'll be all right," Mamie concluded. She sensed the anticlimax, the disappointment even, and made an exasperated circular motion of her hand, with its flesh-colored hospital bracelet and I.V. shunt. "That when it comes, I'll still be there. Here. You know what I'm saying?"

The visiting couple nodded in eager unison.

"It's the getting there," Mamie admitted, "I don't look forward to."

"No," Andrea agreed, smiling her bright healthy smile. She was dressed in a gray wool suit whose broad lapels made her look more buxom than usual.

David searched himself for something to say, but his tongue was numbed by memories of Mamie, from kindergarten on: the round-faced little girl being led to the asphalt playground by her round-faced mother; the eager student, knowing all the answers but never pushing them on others or on the teacher, never demanding attention but ready to shine when it fell on her; the cheerleader and class secretary, the pep girl. In their class plays and assembly programs, she always played the part of the impish little sister, while David, for some reason, played the father, with talcum powder in his hair. There was no need for talcum powder now; he had turned gray and then white early, like his own mother.

Mamie was saying, "So I say to myself, 'Mamie, you stop complaining, you've had a wonderful life, and three wonderful children, and it isn't over yet.' Dot offered to have me come live with them, but I wouldn't do it to her, not in the shape I'm in. Jake offered, too, out there in Arizona. He thinks the dryness would be good for me, but what would I do looking out the window at the desert, unable to open a window because of the air-conditioning? The funny thing is—this will amuse you, David, you were always into irony—the rehab I'll be moving to is the same one with my mother already there. She won't be in my unit, but isn't that ironical? I lived two blocks from her most of my life, and now I'll be on the floor just under her."

The yearbook had not predicted that any of their parents would be alive in 2002. "My goodness—your mother must be ninety," David said.

"And then some. Who would have thought it, the way she smoked? And she wasn't averse to a drink now and then, either."

"She was always very nice to me. Even without you being there, I could hang out in your house, waiting for my father to get done at school. We'd play gin rummy."

"She always said, 'David will go places.' "

In memory he saw her mother at the kitchen table like a tenement solitary glimpsed from a passing train—smoke unfurling from a Chesterfield in a glass ashtray, a fanned set of cards in her hand, a glass of some tinted liquid beside her other elbow. She had pasty, deeply dimpled elbows, and she

GEORGE S. ZIMBEL / TEPPER TAKAYAMA FINE ARTS

and her daughter shared curly brown hair, and full, talkative lips, curved up at the corners. For all the bubbly welcome with which the two females of the house received David's visits, there had been a melancholy nap to the furniture, a curtained gloom. It was a semi-detached house with no windows on one side and those on the other giving onto a neighbor's house not six feet away. Mr. Kauffman, a small, almost rudely untalkative lathe operator, was slow to come home from work. Mamie's sunny manner, her busy happiness in high school—the long shiny halls, the organized activities, the tides of young life regulated by bells—had the relief of escape attached to it. Like David's father, who taught there, she felt at home in the broad, chaste communal setting. David's fondness for her had never made it over the edge into the mildest kind of sexual exchange.

"Speaking of going places," David said.

"Yes," Mamie said quickly, recovering her briskness, "you must be off. You two have a wonderful time. David, be sure to say something nice to Betty Lou about the decorations and favors. She *slaved* to find all those things in the class colors."

Betty Lou, though laid-back and slangy, had indeed slaved; the effect was dazzling—swags of maroon and canary yellow, floral centerpieces to match at every table, the walls thronged with enlarged photographs taken fifty and more years ago of schoolchildren in pigtails and knickers, and then of teen-agers in saddle shoes and pleated skirts, corduroy shirts and leather jackets. The boys looked mildly menacing, with their greased pompadours and ducktails and flagrantly displayed cigarettes, a pack squaring their shirt pockets and an unfiltered singleton tucked behind one ear. The girls, too, with their thickly laid-on lipstick and induced blond streaks, had a touch of killer, of determination to get their share of the life to come.

Now, although that life was mostly over, the function room was full of human noise, gleeful greetings and old-fashioned kidding: "God, ugly as ever! Who's your friend, or is that a stomach?"

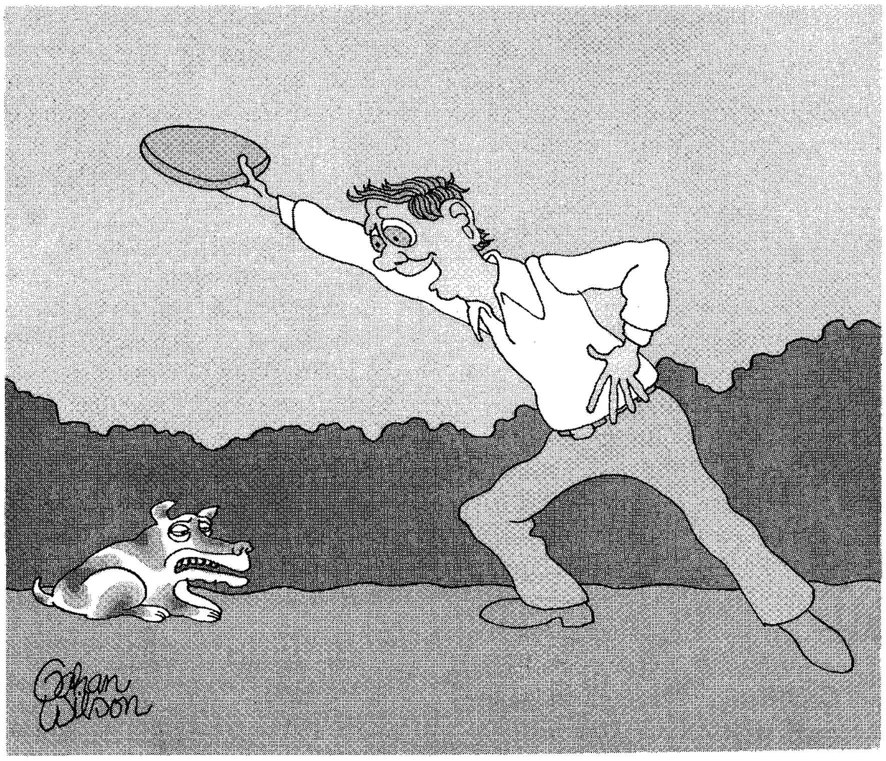
Betty Lou, who without Mamie here was thrown into the chief managerial role, came and seized David above the elbow and turned him away from studying the photographs on the wall to face a well-dressed, well-padded woman with button-black eyes and hair to match, cut short and tastefully frosted.

"Do you know who this is?" Betty Lou asked. Her tone was so aggressive his mind seized up. The mystery woman's features had an owlish sharpness, and the decisively shaped, jet-black eyebrows gave her a frowning look, though she was smiling hopefully, trying silently to sing her identity to David across the decades. He was reminded of walking to elementary school, when Barbara Moyer and Linda Rickenbacker would steal his hat and his rubber-lined book satchel and nimbly keep these possessions out of his reach until tears stung his eyes and he ran away in a tantrum; then the girls would chase him, to give him back what they had grabbed.

Now, again, he was being ganged up on by girls. The seconds stretched. Plump women of sixty-seven or eight have a family resemblance. He stammered—an old problem, long outgrown—when he began to mouth the name of a girl, Loretta Haldeman, who, he realized in mid-stammer, this could not be, for Loretta had attended five years ago, wearing steel-rimmed spectacles with one opaque lens; an eye had given out. This woman with her stern and shiny stare was being presented as a treat, a delicacy, a rarity. He tried to remember who always annoyed the class organizers by never coming, by not coming for fifty years, and thus through the powers of deduction rather than of recognition he named her: "Elizanne!" It was a name like none other, pronounced, they had learned as children, to begin with an "ay" sound, like the mysterious "et" in Chevrolet. It bespoke an ambitious, willful mother, to brand a daughter like this, in so conservative a county.

Elizanne stepped forward to be kissed; David aimed at her cheek, though from the way she puckered she would have taken him on her mouth. "How good to have you here," he said, a bit blankly. She had not been one of the showier girls in the class, though she had aged better than most. Her dress was teal silk and understated, expensive, and suburban. Her husband, that ultimate accessory, was tall and genial, with a trace of Southern accent, a man of business, retired or all but. The two of them were together embarked, David imagined, upon a well-earned sunset career of determined foreign travel, of grandchild-sitting and health-club attendance, of hardworking American leisure modelled on the handsome aging couples in commercials for Viagra and iron supplements. Elizanne, he sensed, had gone places; her face displayed, along with that demure quick smile he could remember—a smile that darted in and out—a good sense of herself, a firm social identity momentarily set aside, like a man's jacket folded into an airplane's overhead bin. Though David was happy enough to see her, he had little to say to her, and less than that to the tan and drawling husband, to whom they must all seem, David imagined, Pennsylvania Dutch hicks.

It was only toward the end of the evening, with their spouses lost in the crowd, that she came up to him. There had been the bumbling monologue by the unofficial class clown, the e-mailed greeting from the unable-to-attend class president, the touching message from Mamie that Betty Lou read aloud, the microphone amplifying the catch in her throat. "We had the best of it," Mamie had written. "No drugs, no school shootings, respect for our teachers, and faith in America." Then the Frankhauser twins, now stooped and heavy of step, performed a soft-shoe routine last presented in senior assembly, and Betty Lou offered thanks to all the committee members, and Butch Fogel announced how to find tomorrow's picnic, though the TV weathermen were predicting rain. The hired entertainment, a female keyboard player with a bassist, sang old songs freighted with nostalgic content for somebody, but not quite for them. Their songs were overlookable oddities tucked into the late forties and early fifties, just before Presley and doo-wop and rock made everything before them funky—the swing bands, the crooners, the iron-coiffed female vocalists, the novelty numbers and moony heart-wringers, to which one did a sluggish box step. Nobody danced. Even five years ago, one couple had dared, and others followed. Now, nobody.



"Get a life."

As the classmates began to shuffle toward the door and whatever fate the next five years would bring, Elizanne came up to David, resting a hand on his forearm and speaking with a firm, lilting urgency, almost as if she were speaking to herself. "David," she said, in this running murmur, "there's something I've been wanting for years to say to you. You were very important to me. You were the first boy who ever walked me home and—and kissed me."

Her eyes, a creamy brown color nearly consumed by her widened pupils in this dimmed function room, sought his, causing her lids with their starry wealth of black lashes to lift. Her eyebrows were released from their frown. Her face, so close and foreshortened, seemed arrived from a great distance. She might have had a drink or two—Fiorvante's had its bar just outside the function room—but she was sober, and now so was he, shocked amid the reunion's loud adult courtesies by this remembrance of their young selves, their true, fumbling selves.

"I remember that walk," he said. But did he?

Elizanne laughed, a bit coarsely—a modern suburban woman's knowing laugh. "It got me started, I must tell you, on a lot of, whatever. Kissing, let's say."

He tried to ignore the experienced, sardonic woman she had become. The forgotten walk was coming back to him. The shy, leisurely passage, in dying light, through Olinger, and the standing close, still talking, at the door of her parents' house, and then his lunge into the kiss, and her equally clumsy yet fervid acceptance of the kiss. He had loved her, for a season. When? Why had the season been so short? Had they kicked fallen leaves as they walked through town, along the Alton Pike with its trolley tracks, into the rectilinear streets of brick row houses, and then on to Elmdale, the section where the streets curved, and the houses stood alone on their lawns, the lawns weedless and the houses half-timbered and slate-roofed and expensive, to the house where Elizanne lived? Had it been spring, shot through with sudden green and yellow, or summer, when bugs swarmed and girls wore shorts, or winter, when your cheeks stung in the dark? He was stricken to have her imply, with a knowledgeable laugh, that she had gone on to kiss others—many others. She had added something he didn't quite catch, in the noise of reunion farewells or in his growing deafness, about "what you all wanted"—a sadly cheap and standard sneer, he felt, about male sexuality, which in that place and era had been a massive, underpublicized impetus that most boys dealt with alone. But the sneer itself dated her, and took them back.

"You were so," he breathed, groping for the word, "dewy." This he did remember, amid so much he had forgotten—her dewiness, a quiet, fuzzy moisture about her skin, her presence. "I'm glad," he added, going into dry adult mode, "it was a successful initiation."

Darkly her eyes held his for a second. She realized that he couldn't express what was there to express, and gave his forearm a squeeze and removed her hand. "I just wanted you to know," she said. This was goodbye, for fifty more years.

Wait, he thought, but instead said, quite inanely, "Thank you, Elizanne. What a sweet thing to remember. Hey, you look great. Unlike a lot of us."

That night, twisting with the reunion's excitement next to Andrea in bed at the Alton Marriott, and for days following, he tried to recapture that walk which had ended in a kiss. Elizanne's house and neighborhood had been more expensive than his, and that had intimidated him. She was not for him. Before too long he got his first real girlfriend, from the class below theirs, who let him hold her breasts and partly undress her, slick as a fish in the parked car. How old would they have been, he and Elizanne? Sixteen, perhaps fifteen. Had it been after a football game, or a school dance? He had not really been very social, nor, after they moved to the country, when he was fourteen, was he free to drift around Olinger as he pleased, though he continued at Olinger High, riding back and forth with his father.

She was in the marching band, he remembered. He could see her in her uniform, her black hair bundled up under her cap and her girl's body encased, somehow excitingly, in the gold-striped maroon pants and jacket. The baton twirlers in their high white boots and short flippy skirts were followed by a maroon unisex mass, and Elizanne was in that phalanx. What did she play? He thought clarinet, but this might have been a slender shadow of her coloring; unlike the other class brunettes, with their highlighted brown waves, she had truly black hair, with lashes and eyebrows to match. The skin of her face had been luminously white in contrast. A fuzz on her upper lip made two little smudges.

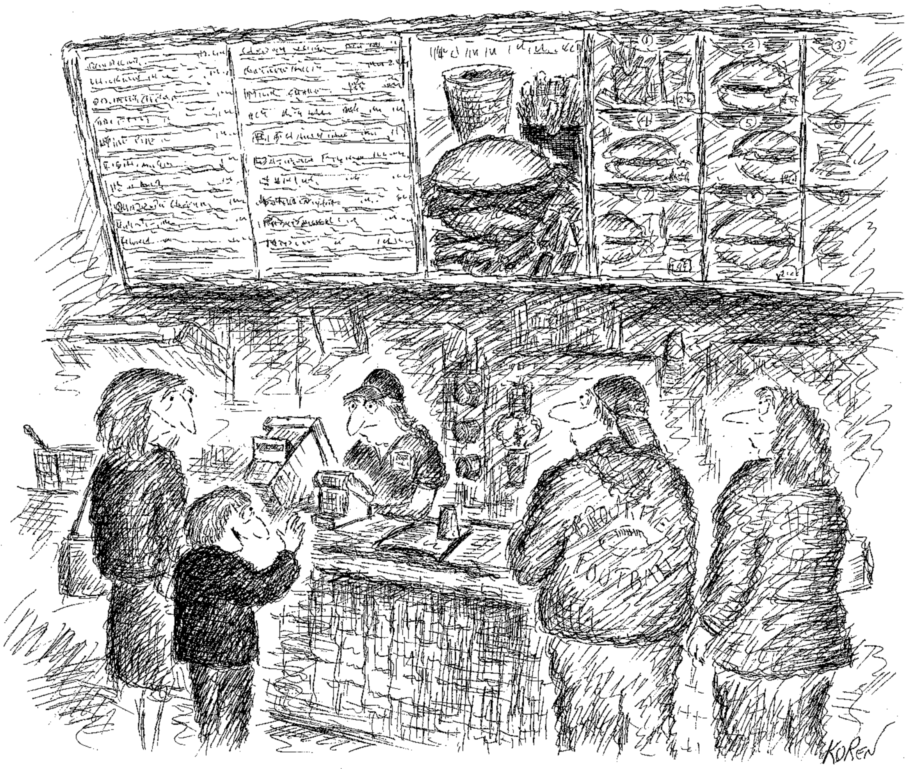
Remembering the dark fuzz, most noticeable in the downward view, gave him another piece of memory: dancing with her, holding her close while shuffling, her corsage and strapless taffeta bodice and the taffeta small of her back with its little ridges and his feet and armpits and shoulder blades in the rented summer tux all melting into one continuum of sweat while the streamers overhead drooped and the mirror ball flung its reflections frictionlessly across the floor and the band, its muted trombones sobbing, finished its rendition of "Stardust" or "Goodnight Irene." His and Elizanne's cheeks felt pasted together and yet when the music stopped he didn't want to let go; he continued, pantingly, to drink her in, her foreshortened demure face with its smudged upper lip and dewy expanse of décolletage, the white edges of her strapless bra outlining her gentle bosom.

How often had they danced like that? Why hadn't more come of it? As long as he could remember, the female sex had been sending out combative, formidable scouts in his direction, mothers and grandmothers and teachers, and Barbara and Linda stealing his cap on the way to school, and fellow classroom goody-goodies like Mamie, and here the surface of femininity, that towering mystery in whose presence his life must be lived, yielded to a slight pressure. Without a word, a word that he could remember, Elizanne had submitted to his inept attentions, and indicated a demure curiosity in what he might do for her.

The walk: for weeks after the reunion his mind could not let go of the walk she reminded him they had taken. In the distorting lens of old age it loomed as one of the most momentous acts of his life. The geography of Olinger had been woven into him, into the muscles that pushed his bicycle and pulled his sled. His parents took walks on Sunday afternoons, and he had tagged behind them until his legs balked. His grandfather had worked on the borough crew that had put in some of the new streets on the north side of the main thoroughfare, the Pike. The town was older south of the Pike, where David's house sat, in a ragged neighborhood of mixed architectural styles and vacant lots, some of them planted in corn. He preferred the blocks north of the Pike, where identical brick semi-detached houses, with square-pillared porches and terraced front lawns, had been put up during the twenties. Friends like Mamie lived in these orderly cozy blocks, which had grocery stores or hobby shops or an ice-cream parlor or a barber shop tucked into the front rooms of homes. He loved the houses' tightness, their uniformity, which seemed a pledge of order and shared intention missing from his own patchy neighborhood.

Beyond this section, where a harness-racing track had once tied up sixty acres, contractors in the years before the war positioned handsome limestone and clinker-brick single houses on new streets curving up the side of Shale Hill. David's walk with Elizanne must have taken him from the high school or its grounds on the Pike through the blocks of semi-detached houses, which above their porches held picture windows where seasonal decorations—orange-paper pumpkins and black-paper bats for Halloween, Christmas tinsel, Easter baskets—announced the residents' fealty to the Christian calendar. The trees along the streets changed from horse chestnuts in the old section where he lived to dense lines of Norway maples on the solidly built-up rectilinear streets to drooping, feathery elms and blotchy-barked sycamores, locally called buttonwoods, on the streets that curved. These trees were looser, airier; there was more space and light in the section where Elizanne lived, as if you were ascending a hill, as indeed you were, but a gently sloping hill of money, of airy privilege. And yet she had let him kiss her, there by her thick-panelled front door, with its two-tone chime doorbell, and had remembered that kiss for more than fifty years, and spoke of it as her admission ticket to the wonderland of sex.

If Mamie was right and we live forever, David thought, he could imagine no better way to spend eternity than taking that walk with Elizanne over and over, until what they said, how they



"Could I have the fries al dente?"

touched, whether or not he dared hold her hand in his, and each hair of the fine black down on her forearms all came as clear as letters deep-cut in marble. There would be time to ask her all the questions he had been too slow-witted to ask at their fiftieth. Was this her first husband, or the last of a series? Had she had affairs, in that suburb of her choosing? Had there been a lot of necking, as he had heard there was, on the band bus back from the football games? Was it the bus where she went on with her kissing, the groping that comes with kissing, the flush and hard breathing that comes with groping? Whose girlfriend had she been, in her junior and senior years? He dimly remembered her being linked with Lennie Lesher, the track star, the five-minute miler with sunken acne-scarred cheeks and tight waves of hair soaked in Vitalis. How could she have betrayed him, David, that way? Or with those faceless members of the band? Why had they, David and she, drifted apart after walking through Olinger into the region of more light? Or had it been night, after a dance or a basketball game, her white face with its strong eyebrows and quick smile a nocturnal blur?

For days he could not let her afterimage go, but in time he would, he knew. He could not write or call her, even if Mamie or Betty Lou provided him with her address and number, for there were spouses, accumulated realities, limits. At the time, obviously, there had been limits in their situation, deficiencies. He had had little to offer her but his future of going places, and that was vague and distant. The questions he was burning to ask would receive banal answers. It was an adolescent flirtation that had come to nothing.

"Well, here we are." The streetlights had just come on.

"So soon!" he exclaimed. "You have a n-nifty-looking house."

"Mother's never liked the kitchen. She says it's gloomy, all those dark-stained cabinets. She wants us to move to West Alton."

"Oh, no! Don't move, Elizanne."

"I don't want to, heaven knows. She thinks they have better schools in West Alton. A better class of student."

"My m-mother made us move to the country and I hate it."

"You can't stay in Olinger forever, David."

"Why not? Some do."

"That won't be you."

Her gaze clung to his in her seriousness; her eyebrows slightly frowned. He expected her to turn away and go into her house, but she didn't. He explained, "I ought to get back to the school, my p-poor father's p-p-probably looking for me. It must be past five." The light died earlier each day: it was October. The leaves were turning.

"Tell me honestly," she said, as if to herself, rapidly. "Did I talk too much? Just now, walking."

"No, you didn't. You didn't at all."

"That's what I do, when I let myself relax with someone. I chatter. I go on too much."

"You didn't. It was like you were singing to me."

Her face had not exactly come closer to his, but its not turning and moving away made it feel closer. Cautiously he bent his face into hers, a little sideways, and kissed her. Elizanne's lips took the fit snugly, warmly; she pressed slightly into the kiss, from underneath, looking for something in it. David felt caught up in a stream flowing counter to the current of everyday events, and began to run out of breath. He broke the contact and backed off. They stared at one another, her black eyes button-bright in the sodium streetlight, amid the restless faint shadows of the half-brown big sycamore leaves. Then he kissed her again, entering that warm still point around which the universe wheeled, with its load of stars not yet visible, the sky still blue above the streetlights. This time she backed off. A car went by, maybe containing somebody they knew, a spy or gossip. "And there was even more," she said, giggling to show that she was poking fun at herself now, "that I wanted to say."

"You will," he promised, breathlessly. His cheeks were hot, as if after gym class. He was worried, with an anxious stir of his stomach, about his father waiting for him. He felt as he had when, his one weekend at the Jersey Shore the past summer, a wave carrying his surfing body was breaking too early and about to throw him forward, down into the hard sand. "I want to hear it all," he told Elizanne. "We have t-tons of time." ♦

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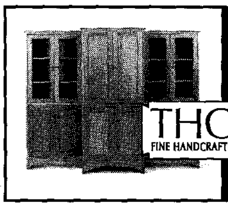

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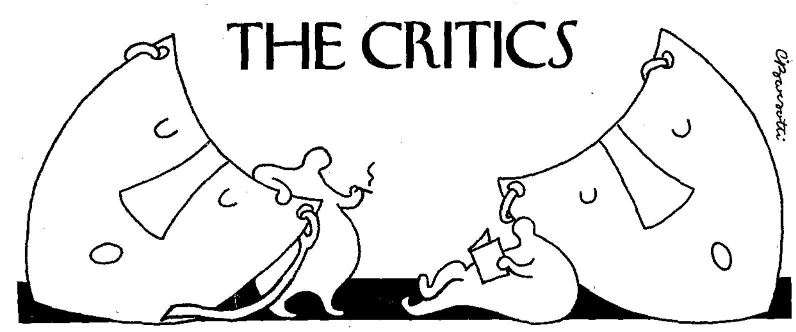


BOOKS

HATE AND HEDONISM

The insolent art of Michel Houellebecq.

BY JULIAN BARNES

In 1998, I was one of the judges of the Prix Novembre, in Paris: a prize given, as its name implies, late in the literary season. After the Goncourt had got it wrong, and after stumblebum efforts by other prizes to correct the Goncourt's errors, the Prix Novembre would issue a final, authoritative verdict on the year. It was unusual for a French prize in having a (slowly) rotating jury, foreign judges—Mario Vargas Llosa was also there—and serious money attached: about thirty thousand dollars for the winner.

That year, the major prizes had all failed to honor Michel Houellebecq's "Les Particules Élémentaires," and for months *le cas Houellebecq* had been simmering. Schoolteachers had protested the book's explicit sexuality; the author had been expelled from his own literary-philosophical group for intellectual heresy. Nor was it just the book that provoked. One female member of our jury declared that she had admired the novel until she watched its author on television. The Maecenas of the prize, a businessman whose interventions the previous year had been very low-key, made a lengthy and impassioned attack on Houellebecq. He seemed, at the least, to be indicating where he didn't want his money to go.

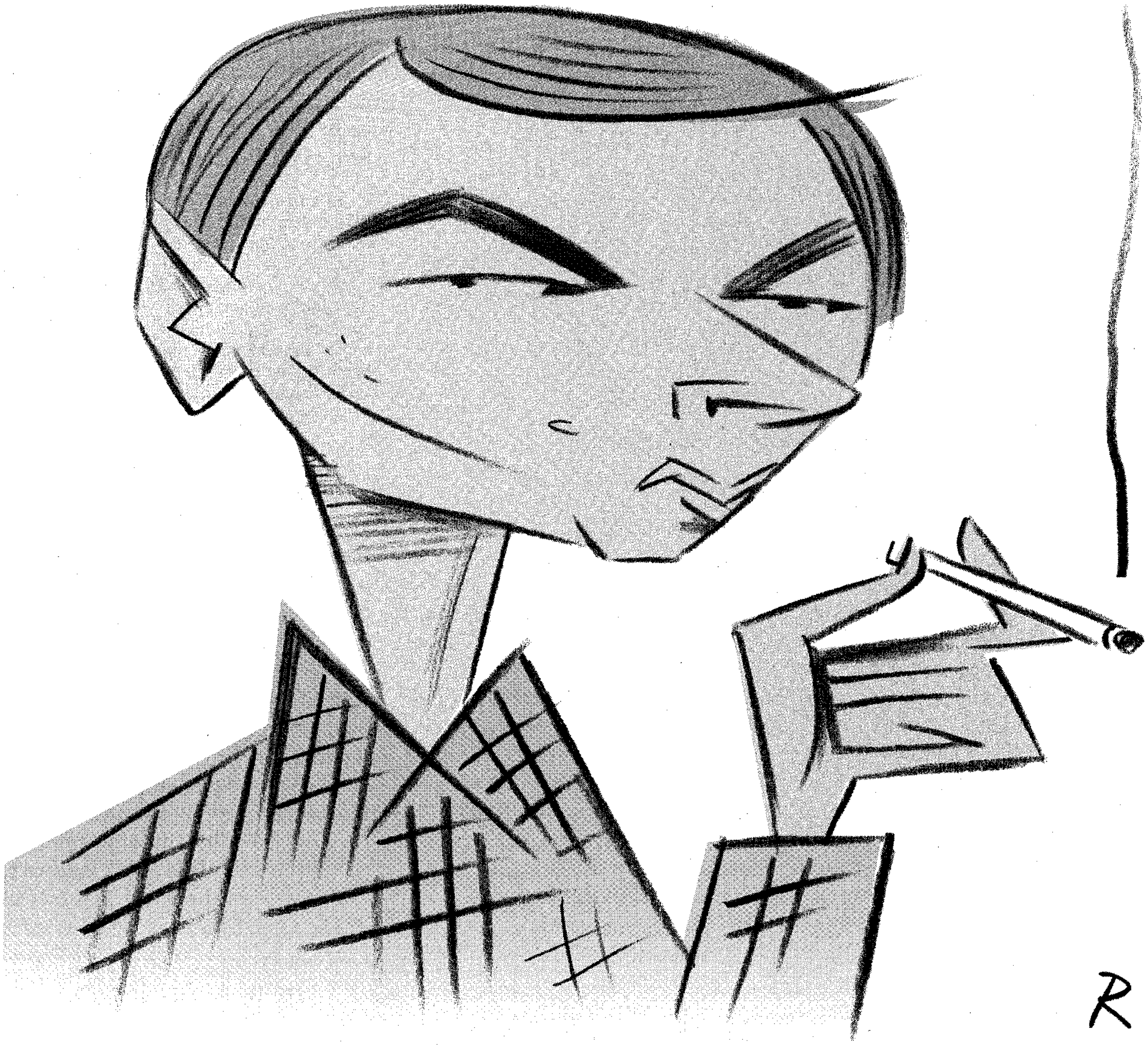
In the course of a rather tense discussion, it was Vargas Llosa who came up with the best description of "Les Particules Élémentaires": "insolent." He meant it, naturally, as a term of praise. There are certain books—sardonic and acutely pessimistic—that systematically affront all our current habits of living, and treat our presumptions of mind as the delusions of the cretinous. Voltaire's "Candide" might be taken as the perfect example of literary insolence. In a different way, La Rochefoucauld is deeply insolent; so is Beckett, bleakly, and Roth, exuberantly. The book of insolence finds its targets in such concepts as a purposeful God, a benevolent and orderly universe, human altruism, the existence of free will.

Houellebecq's novel—his second—was very French in its mixture of intellectuality and eroticism; it was reminiscent of Tournier in the evident pride it took in its own theoretical bone structure. It also had its faults: a certain heavy-handedness, and a tendency for the characters to make speeches rather than utter dialogue. But, in its high ambition and its intransigence, it was clearly superior to the other immediate contender for the prize, a novel that was very French in a different way: elegant, controlled, and old-fashioned—or, rather, *classique*, as I learned to say in judges' jargon.

Houellebecq squeaked it by a single vote. Afterward, I was talking to the president of the jury, the writer and journalist Daniel Schneidermann, about the fuss our winner had kicked up in the press and on television. Perhaps, I suggested, it was just that he wasn't *médiatique*—mediagenic. "On the contrary," Schneidermann (who had voted for Houellebecq) replied. "He's *médiatique* by being *anti-médiatique*. It's very clever." An hour or so later, in a gilded salon of the Hotel Bristol, before literary Paris's smartest, a shabby figure in a baggy sweater and rumpled scarlet jeans took his check and—in the spirit of his novel—declined to wallow in bourgeois expressions of pleasure or gratitude. Not all were charmed. "It's an insult to the members of the jury," one French publisher whispered to me, "for him to accept the prize without having washed or gone to the dry cleaner's."

Our Maecenas also got huffy, and announced the following year that the Prix Novembre would be suspended for twelve months, so that we could discuss its future direction. Most jury members thought this unnecessary, not to say a touch insolent; so we decamped to a new sponsor and renamed ourselves the Prix Décembre. Meanwhile, the novel was translated into English, and Anglophones became aware of what Schneidermann had told me: its author was *médiatique* by being *anti-médiatique*. The literary world is one of the easiest in which to acquire a bad-boy reputation, and Houellebecq duly obliged. When the (female) profiler from the *Times* visited him, he got catatonically drunk, collapsed face down into his dinner, and told her he'd answer further questions only if she slept with him. Houellebecq's wife was also enlisted, posing for the photographer in her underwear and offering a loyal quote of treasurable quality. "Michel's not depressed," she told the interviewer. "It's the world that's depressing."

If Houellebecq is, on the evidence of "The Elementary Particles," the most potentially weighty French novelist to emerge since Tournier—and the wait has been long, and therefore overpraise understandable—his third novel, "Platform" (translated by Frank Wynne; Knopf; $25), opens with a nod in an earlier direction. No French writer could begin a novel "Father died last year" without specifically invoking Camus's "The Stranger." Houellebecq's narrator is called Renault, perhaps hinting that such a man has become a mere cog in a mechanized society; but the name also chimes with Meursault, Camus's narrator. And for a clincher: Renault's father has been sleeping with his North African cleaner, Aïcha, whose brother beats the old man to death. When the son is brought face to face with his father's murderer, he reflects, "If I had had a gun, I would have shot him without a second thought. Killing that little shit . . . seemed to me



The literary world is one of the easiest in which to acquire a bad-boy reputation, and Houellebecq has duly obliged.

ROBERT RISKO

a morally neutral act." Cut to Meursault's gunning down of the Arab on the beach in Algiers, and his similar moral indifference to the act.

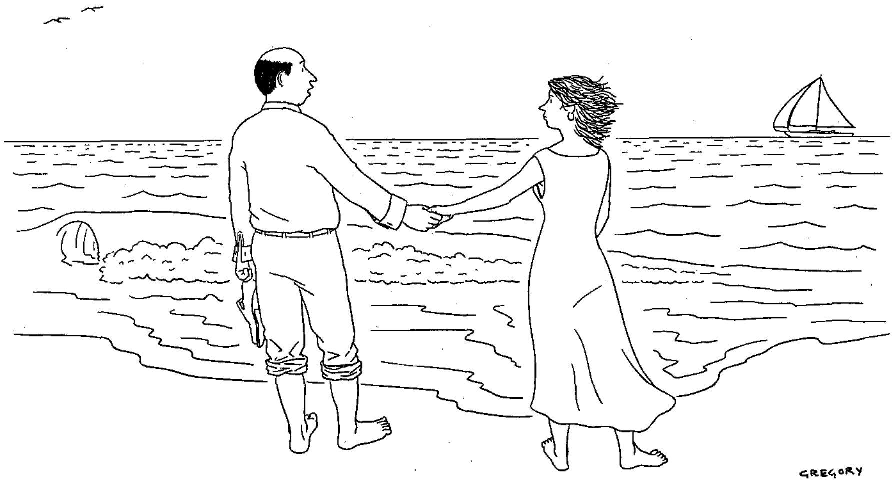
But, in the sixty years that lie between "The Stranger" and "Platform," alienation and anomie have moved on. So have expressions of disrespect for the parent. As a schoolboy in the sixties, I found Meursault's transgressive opening words—"Mother died today. Or perhaps yesterday, I don't know"—registering like a slap (and I wasn't a pious son, either). Nowadays, you have to slap harder:

> As I stood before the old man's coffin, unpleasant thoughts came to me. He had made the most of life, the old bastard; he was a clever cunt. "You had kids, you fucker," I said spiritedly, "you shoved your fat cock in my mother's cunt." I was a bit tense, I have to admit. It's not every day you have a death in the family.

Houellebecq ups the ante; but it's also his trademark to follow the coffinside vituperation with the wry "I was a bit tense." "The Elementary Particles" was hard to summarize (well, it's about the third "metaphysical mutation" of the last two thousand years, that of molecular biology, which will see cloning put an end to the fear of death and the miseries of genetic individualism . . .) without making it sound heavy; on the page, there was a satirical glee to its denunciations, drollery in the dystopia.

"Platform" begins very much in the mode of "The Elementary Particles," with a radically detached male narrator, a child of the information age, excoriating the falseness of the world. He boasts the "disinterested attitude appropriate to an accounts manager" toward almost everything. He is emotionally mute, and socially, too, and thus barely able to converse with Aïcha. When she begins criticizing Islam, he more or less agrees, though he isn't entirely hard-line about it: "On an intellectual level, I was suddenly capable of acknowledging the attractions of the Muslim vagina."

Anyone not yet offended? But Houellebecq, or, rather, "Michel," as his narrator is elidingly called, has barely started. Snorting contempt is coming the way of the following: Frederick Forsyth and John Grisham; Jacques Chirac; the Guide du Routard (a French equivalent of the Rough Guides); package tourists; France ("a sinister country, utterly sinister and bureaucratic"—copy that to Bush and Blair); the Chinese; the "bunch of morons [who] died for the sake of democ-



"What if my bliss happens to be suing people?"

• •

racy" on Omaha Beach; most men; most women; children; the unattractive; the old; the West; Muslims; the French channel TV5; Muslims again; most artists; Muslims yet again; and finally, frequently, the narrator himself.

What does Michel approve of? Peepshows, massage parlors, pornography, Thai prostitutes, alcohol, Viagra (which helps you overcome the effects of alcohol), cigarettes, non-white women, masturbation, lesbianism, troilism, Agatha Christie, double penetration, fellatio, sex tourism, and women's underwear. You may have spotted an odd one out there. Frederick Forsyth may be a "halfwit," while John Grisham's books are good only for wanking into: "I ejaculated between two pages with a groan of satisfaction. They were going to stick together; didn't matter, it wasn't the kind of book you read twice." But Agatha Christie receives two pages of adulation, mainly for her novel "The Hollow," in which she makes clear that she understands "the sin of despair." This is "the sin of cutting oneself off from all warm and living human contacts"—which is, of course, the sin of Michel. "It is in our relations with other people," he remarks, "that we gain a sense of ourselves; it's that, pretty much, that makes relations with other people unbearable." Further: "Giving up on life . . . is the easiest thing a person can do"; and "Anything can happen in life, especially nothing."

The sin of despair is compounded when the sufferer is a hedonist. "Platform" is concerned with tourism, sex, and the combination of the two. Tourism is considered the biggest single industry on the planet, a pure locus of supply and deliberately massaged demand. One key appeal for the novelist is tourism's psychology: not least the central, Flaubertian irony whereby anticipation and remembrance (the brochure's false promise of happiness, the holiday snap's grinning lie) often prove more vivid and reliable than the moment itself. One key danger for the novelist—not always avoided here—is that of easy satire: tourists make soft targets not just for terrorists.

Houellebecq sends Michel off on a sun-and-sex vacation; his largely crass companions include the acceptable, indeed positively attractive Valérie, who works for a travel agency. Much of the immediate plot turns on her attempts and those of her colleague Jean-Yves to revive an ailing branch of the corporation they work for. This is all adequately done, though Houellebecq's strengths and interests as a writer are not particularly those of traditional narrative. His approach to a scene, and a theme, often reminds me of a joke current in Euro circles. A British delegate to some E.U. committee outlines his country's proposals, which, being British, are typically pragmatic, sensible, and detailed. The French delegate reflects noddingly on them for a considerable period of time, before delivering judgment: "Well, I can see that the plan will work in practice, but will it work in theory?"

Thus the primary, obvious link between sex and tourism is the carnal, interpersonal (and impersonal) one. But just as important for Houellebecq is to find the theoretical connection. Which he does: both sex and tourism exemplify the free market at its most free. Sex has always appeared capitalistic to Houellebecq. Here is his formulation from his first novel, "Whatever":

> In an economic system where unfair dismissal is prohibited, every person more or less manages to find their place. In a sexual system where adultery is prohibited, every person more or less manages to find their bed mate. In a totally liberal economic system certain people accumulate considerable fortunes; others stagnate in unemployment and misery. In a totally liberal sexual system certain people have a varied and exciting erotic life; others are reduced to masturbation and solitude.

This kind of swift, audacious linkage is Houellebecq at his best; he loves nothing more than working over what in "The Elementary Particles" he called "the libidinal, hedonistic American option." But his actual writing about sex in "Platform" is curiously both pornographic and sentimental. Pornographic in the sense of taking all its moves and images from pornography (who put what where and moved it whither, until a convulsive spurt-'n'-groan); also, written like pornography of a decent, middle-ranking kind (the translation, throughout, is exemplary). Sentimental in that the novel's really nice, straightforward characters are Oriental masseuses and prostitutes, who are presented as being without flaws, diseases, pimps, addictions, or hangups. Pornographic *and* sentimental in that nothing ever goes wrong with the sexual act: pneumatic bliss is always obtained, no one ever says "No" or "Stop" or even "Wait," and you just have to beckon to a non-white-skinned maid on the hotel terrace for her to pop into the room, quickly reveal that she is braless, and slide seamlessly into a threesome. Houellebecq sees through everything in the world except commercial sex, which he describes—perhaps appropriately—like one who believes every word and picture of a holiday brochure.

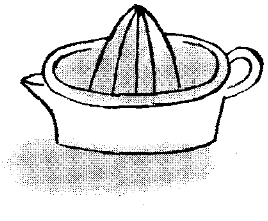
And then there is love. "I really love women," Michel tells us on the opening page. Later, he elaborates: "My enthusiasm for pussy" is one of "my few remaining recognizable, fully human qualities." Despite "loving women," Michel pointedly never refers to his mother. And when this depressed, old-at-forty sex tourist gradually finds himself becoming involved with Valérie, you wonder how Houellebecq will handle it. After all, it is a piece of literary insolence to make such a character fall in love in the first place. So how is love different for Michel from commercial sex? Happily, not very. Valérie, though at first she appears rather dowdy and browbeaten, turns out to have wonderful breasts; she is as good in bed as a Thai prostitute, and she doesn't just go along with threesomes—she instigates them. She is by nature docile, yet she holds down a good job and is very well paid; like Michel, she scorns designer clothes. And that's about it, really. They don't do any of that old stuff like talking about feelings, or thinking about them; they don't go out much together, though he does take her to a wife-swap bar and an S & M club. He does a spot of cooking; she is often so tired from work that it isn't until the next morning that she can give him a blow job. This is less insolent than fictionally disappointing. Oh, and Valérie has to die, of course, just when she has found happiness and the couple have decided to live on a paradise island. The setup, and execution, of this would have been improved upon by Grisham or Forsyth.

Why, to go back to the start, does Michel hate his father so? This is one question a normally inquisitive reader might ask after that coffinside denunciation. What do we learn of this "old bastard," this "clever cunt," this "moron in shorts," this "hideously representative element" of the twentieth century? That he was over seventy when he died, that Aïcha was "very fond" of him, that he exercised a lot and owned a Toyota Land Cruiser. Hardly grounds enough, you might think. But we also learn, further on, that this monster was once struck down by a sudden, inexplicable depression. "His mountaineering friends had stood around awkwardly, powerless in the face of the disease. The reason he immersed himself in sports, he once told me, was to stupefy himself, to stop himself from thinking." This is all new (we hadn't been told before that the father was a mountaineer); and you might think, since Michel is himself depressed, that it might have been reason for sympathy. But this is all we get, and the father swiftly disappears from the narrative, as he does from Michel's thoughts.

Within the novel, the filial hatred is just an inexplicable given. But in an interview Houellebecq gave a few years ago in the magazine *Lire* he says that his parents abandoned him when he was five, leaving him in the care of a grandmother. "My father developed early on a sense of excessive guilt," Houellebecq says. "He once told me the strangest thing: that he devoted himself to intense physical activity so much because it stopped him thinking. He was a mountain guide."

No reason why this strange confession shouldn't be used by a novelist; but if it is to work it needs to be supported fictionally. In "Platform," the slippage between Michel R. and Michel H. is more serious than this bit of autobiographical leaching might suggest. There are problems with the narrative, officially a first-person account by Michel R., but one that (insolently?—well, anyway, unjustifiedly) dodges into the third person if it needs to tell us what only Michel H. can know. (There is even an incompetent moment when Michel R. gives us his judgment on a character he hasn't yet met.) Within Michel himself, there is also some curious slippage. Thus he sets off on holiday with "two American best-sellers that I'd bought pretty much at random at the airport" (this despite feeling *de haut en bas* about Forsyth and Grisham); he also has the Guide du Routard. Fair enough for a sex tourist, you may think. Later, a little surprisingly, he panics at the thought of having nothing to read. Later still, back home, he turns out to be an assiduous reader of Auguste Comte and Milan Kundera; he also quotes confidently from Kant, Schopenhauer, and social theoreticians. Is this credibly the same character, or is it someone shifting to meet the needs of the moment?

The sense of Houellebecq's being a clever man who is a less than clever novelist obtrudes most in the novel's dealings with Islam. Structurally, the function of what Michel calls the "absurd religion" appears to be to deliver, at the end, an extreme and murderous disapproval of the happy sex tourists. Its running presence, however, consists in a trio of outbursts. The first is from Aïcha, who launches unasked into a denunciation of her Mecca-stupefied father and her useless brothers ("They get blind drunk on pastis and all the while they strut around pretending to be the guardians of the one true faith, and they treat me like a slut because I prefer to go out and work rather than marry some stupid bastard like them"). Next, there is an Egyptian once encountered by Michel in the Valley of the Kings, an immensely cultivated and intelligent genetic engineer, for whom Muslims are "the losers of the Sahara" and Islam a religion born among "filthy Bedouin" who did nothing but "bugger their camels." Then, there is a Jordanian banker met in Bangkok, who in the course of a general denunciation points out that the sexual paradise promised to Islamic martyrs is much more cheaply obtainable in any hotel massage parlor. Extraordinary that three casual meetings on three different continents should turn up three vociferous Arab Islam-despisers who disappear from the narrative immediately their work is done. This isn't so much an author with his thumb on the scales as one clambering into the weighing pan and doing a tap dance. (Book-chat parenthesis: Houellebecq told *Lire* that his mother had become a Muslim, adding, "I can't bear Islam.")



Before I started reading this novel, a friend gave me an unexpected warning: "There's a scene where the narrator and his girlfriend and another woman have a threesome in the hammam at the thalassotherapy center in Dinard." His tone hardening, he went on, "Well, I've been there, and it's *just not possible*." He is not a pedantic man, and his attitude surprised me. But now I quite understand it. Fictional insolence is a high-risk venture; it must, as "The Elementary Particles" did, take you by the ear and brain and frog-march you, convince you with the force of its rhetoric and the rigor of its despair. It should allow no time for reactions like Hang on, that's not true; or Surely, people aren't that bad; or even Actually, I'd like to think this one over. "Platform," fuelled more by opinions and riffs and moments of provocation than by thorough narrative, allows such questionings to enter the reader's head far too often. Is sex like this? Is love like this? Are Muslims like this? Is humanity like this? Is Michel depressed, or is the world depressing? Camus, who began by creating in Meursault one of the most disaffected characters in postwar fiction, ended by writing "The First Man," in which ordinary lives are depicted with the richest observation and sympathy. The trajectory of Houellebecq's world view will be worth following. ♦

BOOKS

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Black music's crossover act.

BY HILTON ALS

In the summer of 1974, after nearly twenty years of one-night stands, sluggish record sales, and the complications inherent in maintaining a variety of hair styles, George Clinton, a thirty-three-year-old former barber from Plainfield, New Jersey, scored a hit with his band, Parliament. The song, "Up for the Downstroke," had a hook that "embedded itself so deeply in the recipient generation of black young . . . that a quarter-century later suburban-bred scriptwriters of ESPN sports highlight shows still routinely enliven their copy with references to basketball players 'getting up for the downstroke,'" Arthur Kempton tells us in his moving, dense, and fascinating book, "Boogaloo: The Quintessence of American Popular Music" (Pantheon; $27.50). In it, Kempton examines the lives and careers of rhythm-and-blues ("boogaloo") stars and star producers, beginning with Thomas A. Dorsey, an early-twentieth-century gospel-music pioneer and onetime advocate of the low-down; turning to Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown Records and the world's most successful black record producer from the late nineteen-fifties to the seventies; and ending with the rise and fall of the sad, lost gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur, who was killed in 1996—a death that some dismissed as just another deal in the business of show called boogaloo.

What Clinton "showed" with "Up for the Downstroke" and subsequent records, and what made him a pivotal figure in the history of rhythm and blues, was his ability to make the genre relevant in a world then consumed by disco and rock. Clinton produced his own records, and the song's distinctive hook and over-all construction, with "jazzy time changes and horn figures, pitch-perfect jingles and tone-deft atmospherics," were an amalgamation of several black musical motifs. A historian of the dance floor, Clinton borrowed from James Brown's principle that musicians could build a panoply of sound around a single strong, consistent beat (Brown called it "the one"). To that, Clinton added witty free-form lyrics and rhymes that owed a lot to Sun Ra's "arkestrations." He steered boogaloo away from the blues' devastating stories about black heartache, and turned up its funk quotient.

Arthur Kempton

But Clinton's most lasting contribution was to mix and record boogaloo with a level of technical sophistication heard generally only in recordings by white rock groups such as Queen and Kiss. (Clinton went on to produce the Red Hot Chili Peppers, among other white acts.) Before Clinton, a great deal of boogaloo's force came from the way it was recorded: in the most rudimentary manner possible, the better to retain its "primal" quality, or blackness. By mixing the raw and the cooked, Clinton came up with a stew that acknowledged boogaloo's past while presaging its future. He was the bridge between the funky honkings heard on Jim Stewart, Estelle Axton, and Al Bell's Memphis-based Stax recordings in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, which featured such indispensable artists as Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, and Isaac Hayes—a boys' club of lonely and jubilant warbling—and the chic, postmodern, rap-influenced aural-vérité heard on albums by artists such as OutKast, Jill Scott, and De La Soul today.

Another important ingredient in rhythm and blues, after "the one," is the tension between the religious and the secular: the soul longs for release from this mortal coil—specifically, from the pain of racial prejudice and perpetual economic insolvency—and at the same time the flesh longs for a more immediate physical release. Kempton reveals this tension in his excellent portrait of Thomas Dorsey. The son of a onetime minister, Dorsey was born in Carroll County, Georgia, in 1899, and raised in Atlanta. He was attracted to the city's black night life, and quickly established himself as a piano player. Emigrating to Chicago in 1919, he soon won a spot as the blues singer Ma Rainey's pianist. It was the roaring twenties, and Dorsey knew that whites would pay to shake that thing. Dorsey donated his earnings as an early funkmeister—he wrote "Pat That Bread," "It's All Wore Out," and "Somebody's Been Using That Thing" (pre-Parliament raunch)—to the gospel groups he organized. In the end, his faith was as critical to his survival as his business sense. In the early thirties, Dorsey's beloved wife, Nettie, died in childbirth. Out of his grief, Dorsey wrote what remains, in my opinion, one of the three greatest gospel songs of the last two centuries (the two others being "Amazing Grace" and "Precious Memories"): "Precious Lord." It became a standard for Dorsey's most famous protégée, the gospel queen Mahalia Jackson.

Jackson, who was born in New Orleans in 1911, crossed gospel over to a white audience through her considerable will and charm. "She was a good mixer," Dorsey recalled. "At least she acted like she loved everybody." A full-bodied and vocally more expressive Diana Ross (whom Kempton eviscerates with aplomb in the book's subsequent chapters), Jackson lived in defiance of the music business. She had seen too many other artists, Dorsey included, get ripped off. Kempton writes that by the nineteen-forties, when she was introduced to white radio listeners in Chicago, she "had already turned a profit at gospel singing, the stoop labor of American show business. She had acquired along the way an unbending resolve in matters of money. She demanded every dollar due in cash before each of her performances, and she stayed faithful to the lessons of scarcity's classrooms by using her brassiere as a bank vault and her pocketbook as a checking account."

Berry Gordy, born in the generation after Jackson, was, Kempton writes, a former pimp who dreamed of dominance. He wasn't an artist, longing to be seen: he was an entrepreneur who developed acts, and let those acts become his public face. Deeply self-interested, he hired talent at below cost and created a seraglio of female singers, like Martha Reeves and Diana Ross, who made their "daddy" fat with residuals. Motown Records, the label he founded in 1959, invented one of the most identifiable sounds in pop, epitomized by the silk-tuxedo sleekness of Marvin Gaye, who married into the family—he and Gordy's sister, Anna, were together from 1961 to 1975—and produced more than his share of masterpieces.

It's in the Gordy sections that Kempton overwrites, elaborately intercutting descriptions of Gordy's shady operating with passages from the novelist Iceberg Slim's memoir, "Pimp." But that is a small matter in a work of such scale. Kempton, a son of the esteemed journalist Murray Kempton, sustains his enthusiasm over the course of "Boogaloo" 's four hundred and ninety-eight pages, and the book's untidiness and various repetitions are largely forgivable. George W. S. Trow, writing in this magazine in 1978, said that for many white kids who were adolescents in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties black popular music was their first brush with reality. One senses that this was true for Kempton. It's a measure of his respect for boogaloo that he doesn't diminish its complexity by depicting the white businessmen as devils and the black artists and entrepreneurs as their victims. As Smokey Robinson sang in one of his signature Motown tunes, sometimes the hunter gets captured by the game. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Last Good Time, *by Jonathan Van Meter (Crown; $25).* The genial Atlantic City impresario Paul (Skinny) D'Amato makes frequent appearances in accounts of Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack and of the postwar heyday of the Cosa Nostra. His famous 500 Club, a night club and illegal gambling den, was a favorite Sinatra hangout from the nineteen-forties onward, and his friendships with gangsters such as Sam Giancana and Angelo Bruno were a source of perennial fascination to the F.B.I. But, placed front and center, as he is in this book, D'Amato himself proves disappointing. He clearly had moxie, charm, and diplomacy, and yet, perhaps because of these very qualities, his character remains elusive. Van Meter is enthralled by Atlantic City lore, and is at his best when he uses Skinny as an excuse to explore Prohibition-era corruption under the flamboyant South Jersey fixer Nucky Johnson, or the maneuverings of casino entrepreneurs in the nineteen-seventies to legalize gambling. One wishes he had written a more general history, giving more time to D'Amato's equally colorful confederates.

Absolutely American: Four Years at West Point, *by David Lipsky (Houghton Mifflin; $25).* In 1998, the commandants at West Point offered the author, a *Rolling Stone* reporter, unfettered access to their students. The result is a sunny portrait of a group of young men and women who, as one of them says, "don't quite fit in." Lipsky touches on some recent, controversial attempts at modernizing the academy—such as a ban on hazing and the promotion of "consideration of others" (which in the context of the Army could, in an "extreme instance," mean jumping on a grenade to save the lives of your fellow-soldiers)—but he is more effective as a chronicler of personality than of politics. A cadet defaces his uniform to protest softening standards; a bodybuilder worries that his future wife, following him from post to post, won't have a career; a football star fears life after graduation, wondering, "Can I think for myself?" Though initially ill-disposed toward the military, Lipsky eventually found that "of all the young people I'd met, the West Point cadets—although they are grand, epic complainers—were the happiest."

Midsummer, *by Marcelle Clements (Harcourt; $24).* Clements's second novel is one of those rare, satisfying books in which nothing much happens and yet nothing is left unchanged. Taking place over eight summer weekends at a rented mansion in the Hudson River Valley, it is a portrait of a group of old friends—witty, middle-aged, neurotic, bourgeois-bohemian Manhattanites—who anticipate an idyll of leisure and gossip, only to find all their dissatisfaction and regret surfacing as they sift through past mistakes and missed opportunities. Though they are professionally accomplished (costume designer, author, painter, comedian, sculptor), and old enough to be reconciled to their shortcomings, they remain unhappy and lonely. Clements writes with compassion and wistful humor, setting her characters' melancholy amid effervescent conversation and brilliant summer scenery.

Three Novellas, by Thomas Bernhard, *translated from the German by Peter Jansen and Kenneth J. Northcott (Chicago; $25).* "Why do we still have to live," a survivor of a family suicide pact asks in the first of these novellas, all of which revolve around madness or suicide. The Austrian master Bernhard, whose thirty-year career was devoted to the proposition that to be born is a tragedy and that to live is a punishment nobody deserves to suffer, never managed to come up with a satisfactory answer. These novellas are early works, but the point of view that found devastating expression in masterpieces like "Concrete" and "Yes" is already apparent. What is extraordinary about Bernhard is that his relentless pessimism never seems open to ridicule; his world is so powerfully imagined that it can seem to surround you like little else in literature.

ON TELEVISION

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

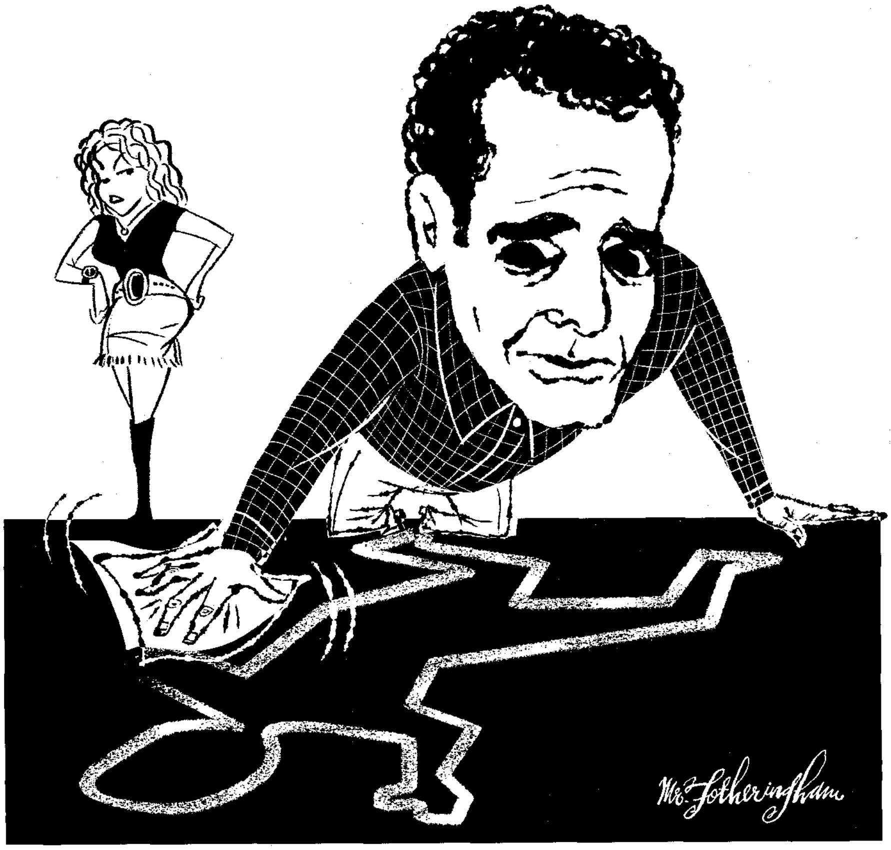
"Monk" begins its second season.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

The USA Network, let's face it, isn't anyone's go-to channel, but, still, I find it strange that not a single person has mentioned its show "Monk" to me in the year since it began. The series, which stars Tony Shalhoub, became so popular so quickly—it is to USA what "The Shield" has been to FX—that by last fall it qualified as one of the biggest basic-cable hits ever. You could attribute the Benedictine silence surrounding the first season of "Monk" to people's not wanting to admit that they're home on Friday nights at ten o'clock, if it weren't for the fact that each episode also aired a second time on weeknights on ABC. I myself was off duty during the entire first season—out of town, away from the media maelstrom, and limiting my viewing to miners, snipers, and the Des Moines weather report—so I only just caught up with some of last year's episodes, as the show was beginning its second season in mid-June. I didn't expect much; in fact, I've been wary of Shalhoub for the last four years, ever since I saw the awful sitcom "Stark Raving Mad," in which he played an unmanageable, "zany" writer. His character was nerve-racking and distracting, like a child in the car in front of you making faces while you're trying to read the road signs, and the performance, unfairly, dislodged Shalhoub's better work from my cranial grooves. That excitable, manic quality—I wanted to bottle it and *not* sell it. But "Monk" is so wonderful, so winning—it pretty much had me by the second minute of the pilot—that it calls to mind the famous line that Audrey Hepburn says to Cary Grant in "Charade": "Do you know what's wrong with you? Nothing." "Monk" 's charm isn't the debonair, sweep-you-off-your-feet kind; the show is, after all, about a detective, Adrian Monk, who suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, which isn't exactly the stuff that swoons are made of. Its comedy and its drama are more genuine and more piercing than that. It's the real thing.

At the beginning of the pilot, a bunch of police officers are standing around in an apartment where a murder has taken place, watching Monk. After a long, grim silence, he says, portentously, "The stove." "Over here," says one of the officers. "No," Monk says. "I mean my stove. I think I left it on." A woman in the group offers to go to his apartment and check. "No, no," he says, and then, his nature getting the better of him, he adds, "Would you?" The back-and-forth goes on for a while, but at the same time that Monk is fretting about his stove he's noticing details at the crime scene that have escaped everyone else's attention. This is both the secret of his success and his bête noire: the fact that he notices things that others don't and the fact that he can't stop noticing them. When Monk's wife was murdered, four years earlier, his already obsessive tendencies mushroomed into a full-blown anxiety disorder. In addition to his compulsions (he wears identical outfits every day, with his shirt buttoned all the way up; he interrupts his therapy session to straighten a pillow on a couch across the room), he's phobic when it comes to heights, crowds, germs, and, of all things, milk.

A year after his wife died, Monk's police badge was taken away by his boss on the San Francisco police force, and Monk's goal since then has been to win reinstatement. He works as a private consultant and is sometimes called in by the mayor to help his former colleagues out with difficult high-profile cases. He is assisted on those cases, and in the trials of daily life, by Sharona Fleming (Bitty Schram), a practical nurse in every sense; she has a no-nonsense approach to getting on with things, because she must—she's a single working mother. Sharona understands Monk better than anyone else does, and they have a great partnership, but she doesn't shield him from her occasional exasperation—she doesn't treat him like a freak. At one point, when she quits (temporarily), Monk says lamely,



Partners in crime-solving: Bitty Schram and Tony Shalhoub clean up San Francisco.

"I'll never forget you," thinking that those words will get her back, and she responds, "You never forget anything." Schram's snappy liveliness makes Sharona more than a satellite of Monk; she is a character in her own right. (The show has also brought out terrific performances in its guest stars, including one by Garry Marshall as an extension-cord salesman.)

Monk's neuroses are a source of comedy, but they're not played for laughs, exactly; though his limitations often trip him up, he's no bumbling Inspector Clouseau. The show, which was created by David Hoberman and Andy Breckman, links Monk's brilliance to his obsessive qualities without oversimplifying the connection. It's not his obsessiveness that makes him brilliant, and it's not his brilliance that makes him obsessive; yet the two can't really be separated. And Shalhoub himself is brilliant at conveying the tension between Monk's desire to conquer his disorder and his dug-in defense of his behavior. He's aware that most people don't go around counting the bricks in a wall or touching every parking meter they walk by, but, for him, not to do so would be to put himself in dire peril. These aren't things that give him pleasure; they're just what he has to do to stay alive.

I think the reason that people don't talk more about "Monk," despite its popularity, is that watching it is an intensely personal, even interactive, experience. Adrian Monk is a kind of private investigator of our own flaws and sadnesses, and no doubt many viewers identify with the myriad intrapsychic obstacles that make it hard for him to get through the day. They don't need to talk to their friends about "Monk," because simply watching the show serves the same function—as sharp as its dialogue is, "Monk" is often touching beyond words. It may be peculiar to feel that you've been understood by a TV show, but in the same way that Sharona gets Monk—once, when he finds out that he's been turned down for reinstatement, he says before walking away, "I just want to be alone," and Sharona says, "I'll come with you," which is exactly what he wants her to do—you feel that "Monk" gets you.

Who's the nuttiest: Viacom, Spike Lee, or New York State Supreme Court Justice Walter Tolub? If you answered, "Hard to say—they're all completely nuts," you are correct. Judge Tolub for giving in to Spike Lee's demand and enjoining Viacom, at least temporarily, from changing the name of its cable channel TNN to Spike TV on the ground that it would exploit Lee's persona; Viacom for having avowedly spent the obscene sum of thirty million dollars advertising the "rebranding" of TNN; and Lee for thinking that he's the first, second, or even third thing people think of when they hear the word "spike." Just off the top of my head, I come up with the Golden Spike, volleyball, the character in the comic strip "Nancy," adulterated beverages, vampires, lots of people's dogs, the director Spike Jonze, and the late, great Spike Jones—whose son, Spike Jones, Jr., has criticized the legal action.

Viacom cooked up the name as part of its effort to create a channel that is aimed at men the way Lifetime is aimed at women. In addition to programs that no longer have a full head of hair—"Baywatch," "Blind Date," and "Miami Vice"—the new TNN will have some "adult" cartoons (Pamela Anderson playing a character called Erotica Jones in "Stripperella") and shows where things crash into other things and smash them. Lee is afraid that the public will think he is associated with the channel, and—much to Viacom's regret, you may be sure—the president of TNN did say that Lee was one of the inspirations for the new handle. But what's been lost in all this is how wrong the name Spike TV is. It's too dynamic for the passively gawking guy the channel wants to reach—something more La-Z-Boyish, like LCDTV (as in lowest common denominator, not liquid crystal display) or Belch!, would be better. Or Viacom could take a page from its own history book and look at how much branding mileage it's got from the single letter "M" in MTV. There is another letter of the alphabet that happens to be perfect. One of the two things that men have and women don't is a Y chromosome, and the letter "Y" handily lends itself to all kinds of design permutations. It can even be made to look like a person—a little guy lifting weights, or splayed on a sofa with a remote control in his hand, or chasing movie directors with a spike, or what have you. So there you are, Viacom: YTV. So what if the name is already being used in Canada by a network for kids? They're Canadian—they won't mind. And if they do, Viacom, which obviously has money to burn, can just buy the whole country and rebrand it. ♦

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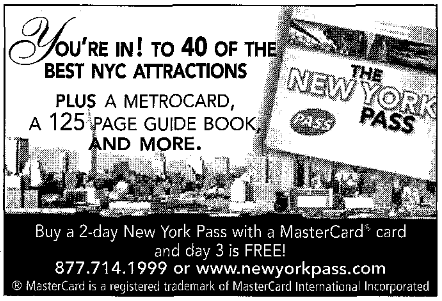
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THE THEATRE

LOCAL STORIES

Two new plays at the Royal National Theatre.

BY JOHN LAHR

In his excellent first season as artistic director of London's Royal National Theatre, Nicholas Hytner has continued the recent company policy of offering safe haven to the best of America's theatrical talent. In this instance—in an adaptation of "His Girl Friday," Howard Hawks's 1940 screwball-comedy version of the 1928 Hecht-MacArthur satire on American journalism, "The Front Page"—the playwright John Guare and the director Jack O'Brien make their Royal National débuts. They return the honor by delivering a rambunctious summer hit. Playfulness is the stock-in-trade of both gents. They show their hand even before the story begins, as the fun machine is cranked up in front of the audience. The flats of the pressroom and the Chicago skyline behind its windows are lowered into place; the smoke machine belches test clouds; the array of bulbous lights above the sprawling Olivier proscenium blink on and off; period jazz music plays over the bustle of actors as they chat with each other and warm up. The stage hubbub makes the play feel like a frisky racehorse being pushed into its gate.

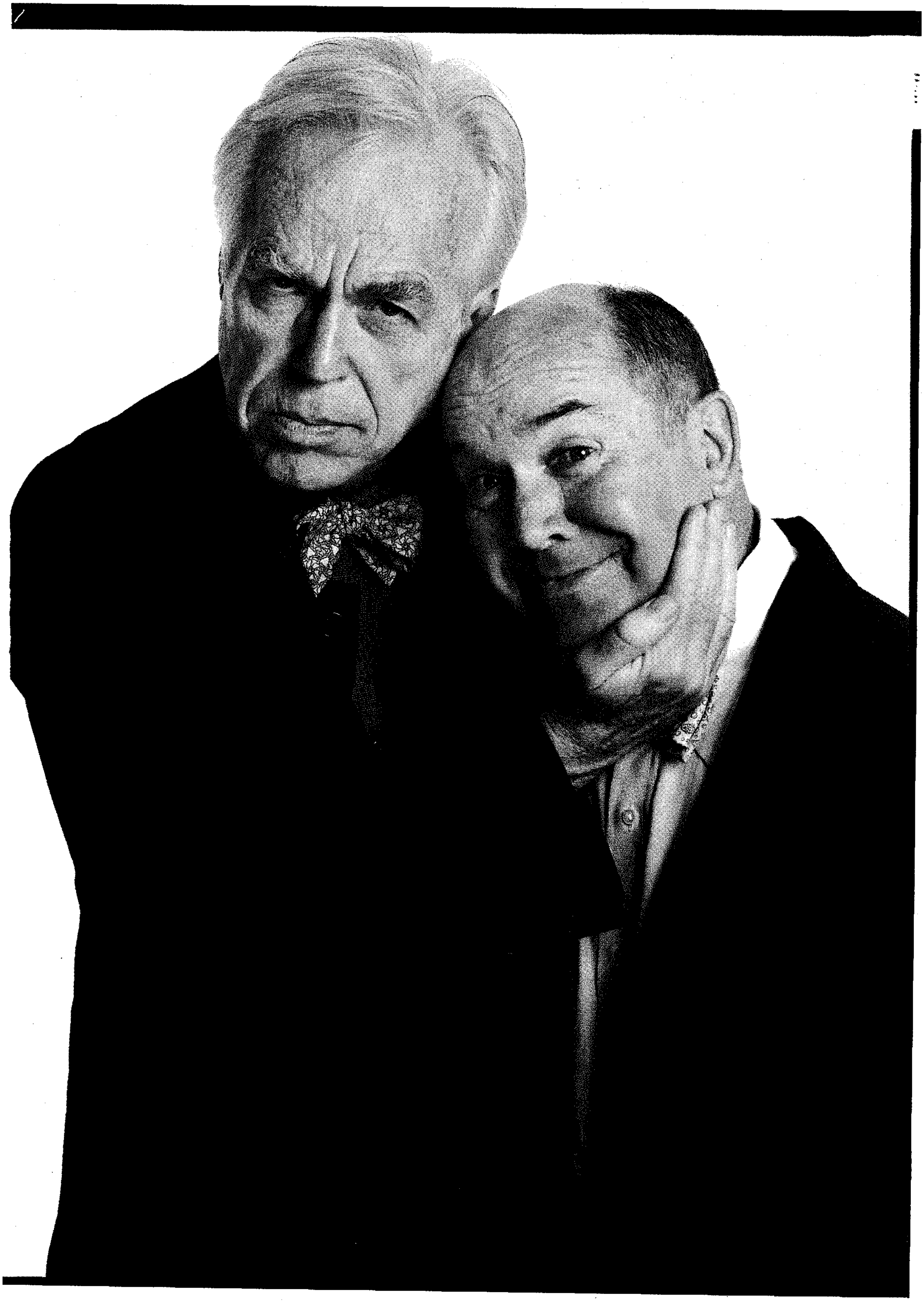
When "His Girl Friday" is finally off and running—a red light signals the start—it stumbles at the first narrative hurdle, bedevilled by the humdrum exposition and the undefined newspaper hacks who sit around waiting for another disaster to report. But with the entrance of the ace *Examiner* reporter Hildy Johnson (Zoë Wanamaker), who is hellbent on leaving journalism for normal life, and her ruthless managing editor, Walter Burns (Alex Jennings), who is equally adamant about keeping his star at the typewriter to cover a sensational local story, the play finds its feet. As the momentum of both the big newsbreak and the big plot complications grows (Guare has added two characters to the play), "His Girl Friday" gathers speed and more or less romps home.

The creators of the original play, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, and its director, George S. Kaufman, were former newspapermen who loved the louche world they were laughing at. Hildy Johnson was, as Hecht and MacArthur said, a "vanishing type—the lusty, hoodlumesque, half-drunk caballero that was the newspaperman of our youth." But in transforming Hildebrand (Hildy) Johnson of the play into Hildegarde (Hildy) Johnson of the Hawks movie, the metaphor does more than change sexes; it changes intention and tone. As a woman, Hildy Johnson is not a vanishing type but a futuristic one: an early version of the independent American female whose fast-talking assertiveness substitutes sass for cynicism.

When Hildy traipses into the pressroom at the Criminal Court Building to say goodbye to the guys and to show off her engagement bagatelle—"You're all my wicked past and I came back to make sure this room smells as bad as I remember"—the gallows are being prepared for the execution of the cop-killing anarchist Earl Holub (Kerry Shale). This is big Chicago news; but Hildy's off to Albany, her wedding, and a new, more secure existence. "For once in my life I'm going to be taken care of," she says of Bruce Baldwin (Richard Lintern), prospective Husband No. 2, taking an incidental swipe at Burns, who was until recently Husband No. 1. Although she is marrying a man who enters wearing rubbers on his shoes in case of rain, Hildy

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

The playwright John Guare and the director Jack O'Brien, who have adapted "His Girl Friday" for the London stage.



herself is a risk-taker. She is constitutionally unable to be passive or proper. She can handle her cards, her stories, her liquor, and, as her motormouth demonstrates, her men. "Rome is burning and I have to run into Nero," she says to Burns—a great Guare line—as she finally sits down to write the story of Holub's jailbreak while the building resounds to volleys of gunfire and shattering glass.

Wanamaker gallivants around the pressroom with terrific swagger. She's a petite dynamo with a glint in her eye, and her gumption plays well against the gleeful cockiness of Alex Jennings. "You're wonderful in a loathsome sort of way," Hildy tells Burns. And he is—during the course of the evening he bribes, cajoles, lies, browbeats, even frames people to get his story and his way. Tall, fair-haired, exuding palpable and humorous sexual confidence, the boyish Jennings plays Burns as all charm and chutzpah. The slap and tickle of the dialogue gives Jennings and Wanamaker some tart, delightful innings. "I don't want to rush you," he says, proposing to her. "Take a couple of seconds." This romantic badinage is a fine fit for the gaiety of Guare's particular kind of blarney. The appearance of the battle-axe mother-in-law to be, Mrs. Baldwin (the piquant Margaret Tyzack, wielding her pocketbook as if she were throwing the hammer), gives both the adapter and the actress a field day.

"The Front Page" ends on one of the great curtain lines of modern comedy. At the train station, Burns hands Hildy his watch as a keepsake, gives him a collegial wave goodbye, then wires ahead to the police to take him off the train. "The son of a bitch stole my watch!" he says. "His Girl Friday" can't manage any such bold comic conclusion. Instead of the satirical, it goes for the farcical. Just when the corruption of the local Chicago politicos is revealed and the governor's purloined reprieve of Holub is made known, and the excitement of the scoop should drive the drama, the plot tries to interweave romance and deadline, which only blurs the story. The hard-bitten defers to the love-bitten. At gunpoint, Hildy both writes her exclusive and marries her editor. "I'll be doggoned!" one journo says. "A shotgun marriage!" But it's a pistol, not a shotgun, that's being drawn on her; this small confusion is typical of a larger narrative problem when the play strains for laughs and not for emotional truth. In the giddy hurly-burly of the ending, "His Girl Friday" almost gets away from its makers. But Jack O'Brien, a canny pro, knows that when he's skating on thin ice his safety is in speed. He pulls it off, but by the time "His Girl Friday" arrives at an American repertory theatre near you, as it surely will, my hope is that O'Brien and Guare will have given it a good tuneup to make their joy ride smoother and more exhilarating.

The comic daydream behind the wisecracking idiom of "His Girl Friday" is never to be at a loss. But loss is the daily diet of the black British in Kwame Kwei-Armah's powerful "Elmina's Kitchen" (at the Cottesloe, directed by Angus Jackson). The West Indian takeout restaurant of the title—"one notch above tacky," according to the stage directions—takes its name from the notorious slave-trade fort in Ghana. The restaurant is situated on East London's "Murder Mile," and it is decorated with photographs of black role models—among many, Muhammad Ali, Nat King Cole, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the mother of the high-spirited proprietor, Deli (the excellent Paterson Joseph), whom the stage directions describe as "a born struggler and self-optimist." Deli is struggling to get a foothold in Britain and to be a proper father to his saturnine teen-age son, Ashley (Emmanuel Idowu), who disdains his father as both soft and square. Ashley wants the good life now; in his rebelliousness, he sees the gangsta route, not hard graft, as the way to get it. While the preamble to the play is filled with buoyant and superbly performed African drumming and chants, the play itself is a fugue for the dispossessed—the loutish Digger (Shaun Parkes), who deals in drugs and protection, Deli's feckless father, Clifton (the expert George Harris), who abandoned Deli when he was ten, the brash but fragile Anastasia (the appealing Dona Croll), who has big hopes for the restaurant and for Deli. Out of the unspoken regret behind each character's bravado, Kwei-Armah manufactures a strong melodrama around three generations of black men. Deli upgrades his restaurant to a West Indian fast-food takeout—Elmina's Plantain Hut—but life is not so easily renovated. Deli's poignant battle to help his son into a responsible adulthood takes a brilliant, shocking turn at the finale, which bears out the bitter calypso sung during the play: "Oh England, what a wonderful land, / In England, what you must understand . . . You's a black man in a cold cold land." ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

MILD IN THE STREETS

"The Hulk" and "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle."

BY DAVID DENBY

When Fay Wray was hoisted into the air by the love-struck ape in the original "King Kong," from 1933, she screamed and screamed in terror. Or was it excitement? There was a touch of lewd humor in the Merian C. Cooper–Ernest B. Schoedsack classic, and, for a full seventy years, making gleeful dirty jokes while watching the movie has been part of its myth and aura. In Ang Lee's "The Hulk," which is an amalgam of the King Kong and Frankenstein stories—and a linear descendant of the Marvel comic book and a so-so TV series—the scientist Bruce Banner (Eric Bana) turns into a rampaging monster whenever he gets angry. Then Bruce—all fifteen feet of him, green, grotesquely muscled, and mostly naked—approaches his lab colleague Betty, who is played by Jennifer Connelly. This actress has become the *mater dolorosa* of the American cinema, forever deposing her men from their cross of suffering. (In "A Beautiful Mind," she gazed with compassion at a different kind of monster.) Connelly's Betty doesn't scream at Bruce's touch; instead, she keens with sympathy and woe, and, at that point, he shrinks to his normal self. This beauty-and-the-beast movie isn't a fable of mad passion; it's a fable of detumescence.

No one could ask the filmmakers, including the writers James Schamus, John Turman, and Michael France, to make the same joke that the creators of "King Kong" made. But without some sort of pop madness roiling around in the basement of the material—some kind of lawless impulse—a monster movie has very little reason to exist. If a man who turns into a behemoth isn't a metaphor for forbidden human desires, then what does he represent? Peculiar eating habits? It turns out that Lee and his collaborators have made an earnest and laborious picture about parent-child relationships (both Bruce and Betty struggle against their parents), thereby reducing fantasy to rational spectacle. "The Hulk" spends a great deal of time worrying about what lies in Bruce's unconscious, but the movie itself doesn't have an unconscious.

Which is not to say that Lee's high-mindedness always goes for naught. "The Hulk" is structurally a mess and unevenly made, but the first forty minutes or so are quite beautiful. Frederick Elmes, who shot "The Ice Storm" for Lee and "Blue Velvet" and other movies for David Lynch, creates a strangely entrancing palette for a desert Army base in the nineteen-sixties. At the time, Bruce is just a baby—a baby, however, with a mad military-scientist father who injected dangerous gene-altering serums into himself before Bruce was conceived. A traumatic event cuts Bruce off from blissful memories of his beautiful mom and his weirdly loving dad, and the last moments of his happiness are shot in the pinks, pale blues, and yellows of a child's birthday party—the colors of longing for childhood harmony and safety. Bruce's loss of memory, coupled with his genetic soup, makes him a repressed, brooding presence as a man.

The early moments in the lab, when Bruce is a grownup, are also crafted with great precision and beauty, and the quiet tones used by the actors are a surprising change from the usual big-budget overemphasis. Yet Lee punctuates the scenes in manipulative ways that make us wary: he throws seething nebulae

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onto the screen, sends clouds of invading blood corpuscles creeping across computer models, and relies on such dubious tricks as shock zooms—a sudden jerk back from, say, the eye of a frog, as if recoiling in fear at what might lie within the animal. All this zipping, whirling hash from the director of "Sense and Sensibility" and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" is intended, I suppose, to prepare us for the big moment when Bruce first swells into monsterhood—when the horror is released. But that moment is a disappointment. The Australian actor Eric Bana, with his hair falling across his forehead, has a slightly damaged look—we certainly get the idea that he's penned up—but when he grimaces and roars and pops his britches the digital image that replaces him doesn't release anything but noise. Although the monster smashes things, bursts through roofs, and fights off ferocious animals, he's a boring beast. He has a big ugly puss and no soul. King Kong and Frankenstein are Byron and Keats by comparison. As the Hulk returns to normal, Bruce tells Betty that it feels great to knock things around, yet Lee doesn't convey that exhilaration. Where's the dramatic center of this movie? If a director isn't going to make sex jokes about the brute (as Mel Brooks did in "Young Frankenstein"), then he should do the other dangerous thing—take us inside the creature's head and make us feel the wild excitement of destruction. Instead, Lee stays outside, and the movie becomes inert. Bruce's father, now an old man (in the mangy person of Nick Nolte), shows up, and he takes on superior powers, too, and wrestles his son for dominance of the world—or something like that. (Nolte delivers a couple of baffling rants that stop the picture cold.) "The Hulk" loses its way in an Oedipal struggle that means nothing to us.

The man becomes a monster, but what does he represent?

As several critics have pointed out, the scene of the morose green giant leaping from one butte to another out West is a rather cheesily rendered effect, and this is a minor tragedy for Ang Lee. After all, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" was made with a minimum of digital work: most of it was cleanly staged in open space, with actors suspended by invisible wires as they scrambled across rooftops and trees. Since the characters were disciplined and intelligent people, we got the sense that they had earned their right to leave the ground not only through physical skill but through self-knowledge, too. "Crouching Tiger" was gravity-bound and airborne at the same time, and audiences were awed by it. But no one will be awed by "The Hulk."

At least the women in "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle" know what they want when they go wild: they want to jump up in the air, flipping backward in delicious slow-mo as they kick some tattooed thug right in the chops; they want to ride a mechanical yak in a Mongolian bar; they want to dress up as riveters, as bikers, as brazen vamps in a strip club; they want to fight all the time, not just in the air but on the ground, and possibly in their dreams, too, and then fall down in a heap and have a laughing fit in each other's arms. They want to have fun every single minute of the day, and they do. The sensationally long-waisted Cameron Diaz, a goofy beauty with a foot-wide smile, takes the pratfalls; Drew Barrymore is still baby-faced and at times moody; Lucy Liu, flinging her black hair like a weapon, is the most imperious of the three. The movie is immensely pleased with itself, in the manner of adorable kids who know they can get away with anything—the commercial opportunism is so self-confident in its silliness that you can't really fight it.

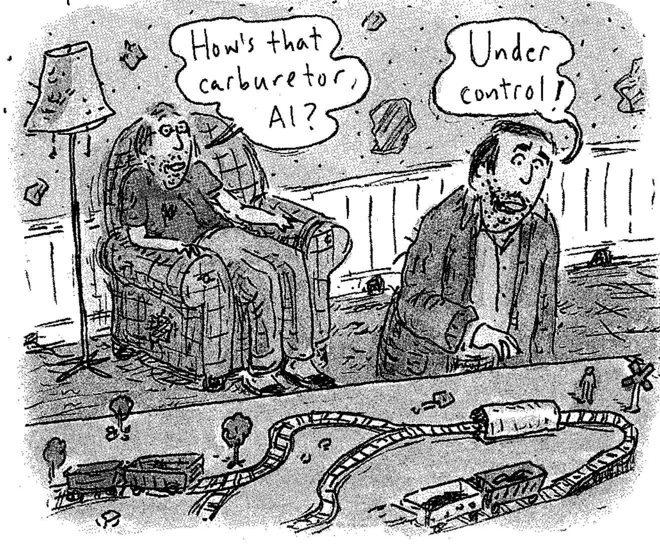
To say that the former music-video ace McG, who directed both "Charlie's Angels" pictures, is essentially making an endless trailer is no knock on him, since he wants only to keep things fast and light. McG and his technicians have developed some curious stutter techniques. In midair, one of the girls will go from normal speed to slow motion and then back again, or the other way around, and a number of the combat sequences have real rhythm and pace; there's an excitingly edited bit of motocross racing, in which dozens of riders on small bikes flip up in the air in twos and threes and attempt to kick each other out of the way. Everything in this movie goes down easily except for the presence of Demi Moore as an ex-Angel who has gone over to the dark side. Moore's closeups reveal her usual lack of humor and what is normally called talent, along with her utter determination to prevail. This is a wind-up toy of a movie, but Moore's tight-lipped concentration is a reminder of how much work goes into the illusion of frivolous inconsequence. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST

SECULAR CLOISTERS

FRED'S PRIORY

For menfolk only. Fishing, model railroads, football, gun talk, farm-machinery repair, etc. No women or woman talk allowed.


How's that carburetor, Al?
Under control!

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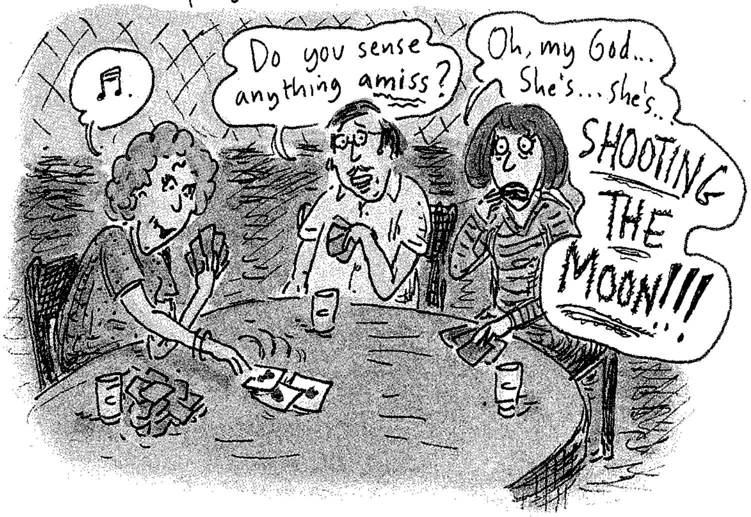
♫.
Do you sense anything amiss?
Oh, my God... She's... she's...
SHOOTING THE MOON!!!

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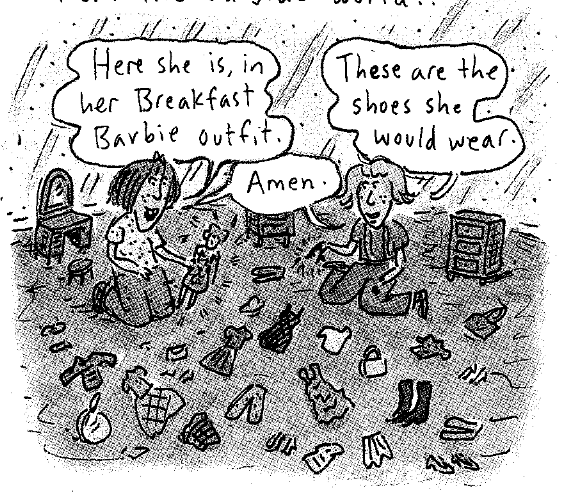
Here she is, in her Breakfast Barbie outfit.
These are the shoes she would wear.
Amen.

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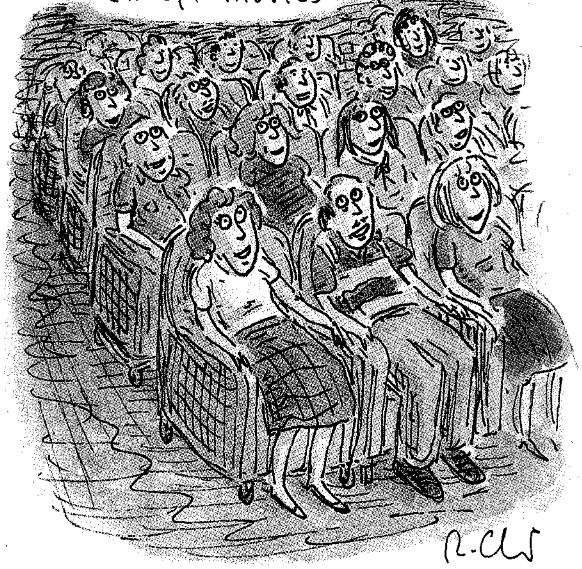
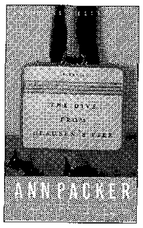


Book Sense 76

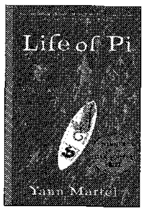
INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Top Ten recommendations from the Summer Paperback Book Sense 76, as voted by independent booksellers

1. EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED: *A Novel*, by Jonathan Safran Foer (Perennial, $13.95, 0060529709) "This book's riches (and they are many) lie in its astonishing range of humor and horror, an awareness of past and present, and a presence that takes very certain words to say. Say them Foer does: daringly, hauntingly, and deeply." **—Rick Simonson, Elliott Bay Book Company, Seattle, WA**

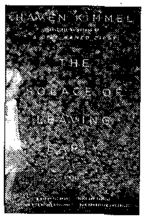


2. THE DIVE FROM CLAUSEN'S PIER: *A Novel*, by Ann Packer (Vintage, $14, 0375727132) "When Carrie Bell's boyfriend breaks his neck and is paralyzed, she is faced with having to decide what it is she owes to those she loves. The writing is wonderful, and at the book's close I felt an unexpected satisfaction and pleasure with the heroine's decisions."**—Leslie Reiner, Inkwood Books, Tampa, FL**

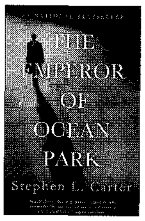


3. LIFE OF PI: *A Novel*, by Yann Martel (Harvest, $14, 0156027321) "Martel weaves a brilliant tale that is part adventure story and part spiritual quest; the portion that deals with Pi and a Bengal tiger adrift on the ocean in a lifeboat together is everything you might imagine and more."**—Stephen Grutzmacher, Passtimes Books, Sister Bay, WI**

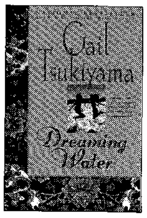
4. RUNNING WITH SCISSORS: *A Memoir*, by Augusten Burroughs (Picador, $14, 031242227X) "This book is like a hybrid offspring of the writings of Derrick Jensen and David Sedaris, as the author's story is both insightful and humorous."**—Lin Orndorf, Malaprop's Bookstore/Café, Asheville, NC**



5. THE SOLACE OF LEAVING EARLY: *A Novel*, by Haven Kimmel (Anchor, $13, 1400033349) "This novel is terrific. I love these characters for having absorbed literature and philosophy, and then remembering it as they tried to make sense of their lives and the lives of others."**—Diane Leslie, Dutton's Books, Brentwood, CA**

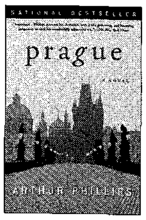


6. THE EMPEROR OF OCEAN PARK: *A Novel*, by Stephen L. Carter (Vintage, $14, 0375712925) "This fantastic literary mystery is the perfect substitute for *War and Peace* this summer. The main character's challenge to solve the puzzle left behind by his dead father keeps the pages turning, and the descriptions of the characters and their complicated relationships are fascinating."**—Terry Lucas, Open Book, Westhampton Beach, NY**



7. DREAMING WATER: *A Novel*, by Gail Tsukiyama (Griffin, $12.95, 0312316089) "I loved Tsukiyama's previous books, and although *Dreaming Water* is very different in content—taking place in the U.S.—it features the same sensitive portrayal of women's relationships."**—Jean Martin, Joseph-Beth Booksellers, Cleveland, OH**

8. INTO THE FOREST: *A Novel*, by Edna O'Brien (Mariner, $13, 0618339655) "A disturbing look into the tortured soul of a man who is haunted by his past. Those haunts drive him deeper into an inner evil that he cannot release himself from. You are drawn into this book until the very last page."**—Joy Winslow, Danner's Books, Muncie, IN**



9. PRAGUE: *A Novel*, by Arthur Phillips (Random House, $13.95, 0375759778) "The setting is Budapest in the '90s, when locals thought far more was happening in Prague. The bars and cafés salute the Jazz Age, catering to a generation in search of riches, the past, and a culture to call their own, but not ready to face the truth. I loved this book."**—Barbara Theroux, Fact & Fiction, Missoula, MT**

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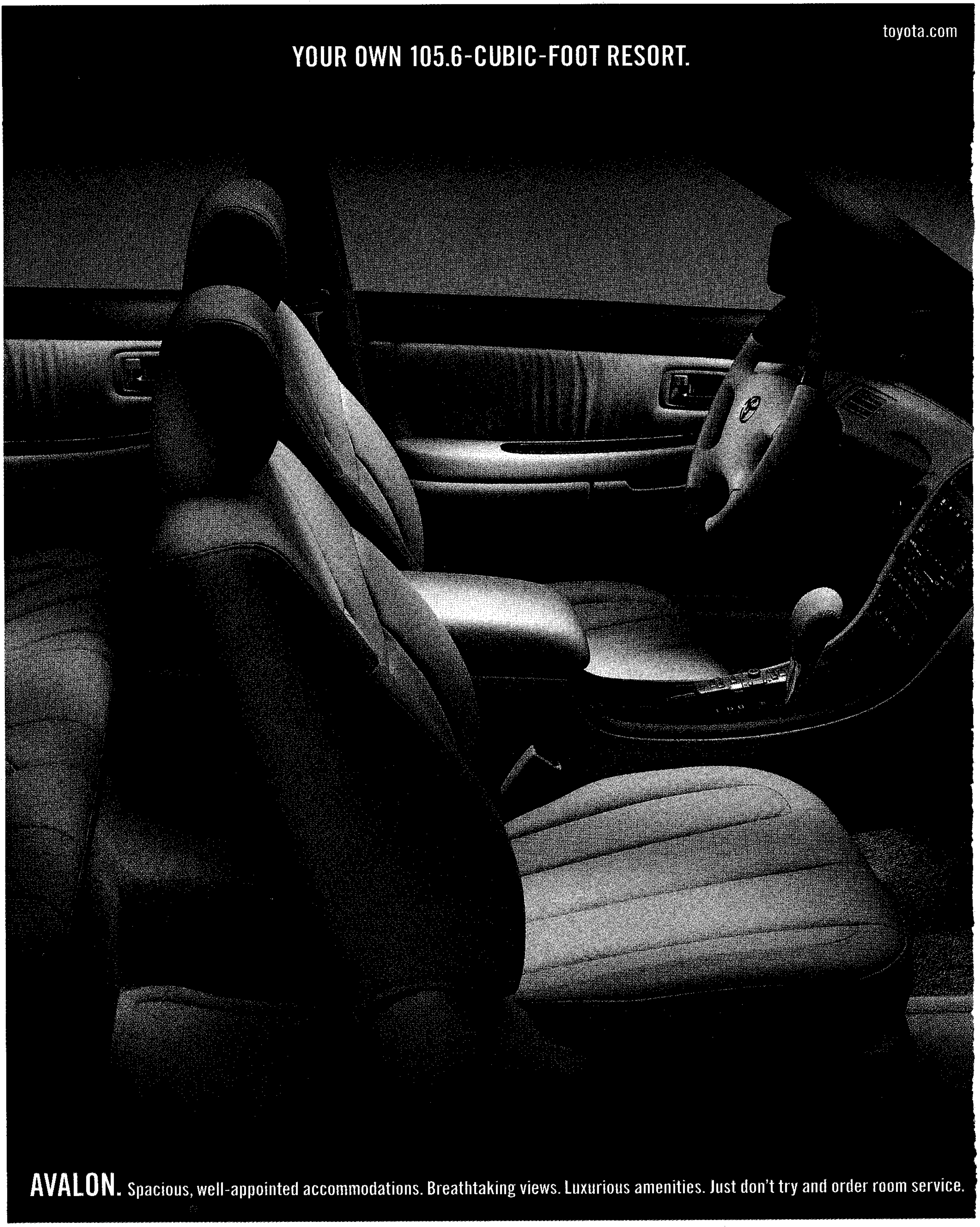
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